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Tuned in: Television and the teaching of writing

Bronwyn Thomas Williams
University of New Hampshire, Durham

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TUNED IN: TELEVISION AND THE TEACHING OF WRITING

BY

BRONWYN T. WILLIAMS
B.A. Indiana University, 1983
M.A. University of New Hampshire. 1989

DISSERTATION

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This dissertation has been examined and approved.

Patricia Sullivan

Dissertation Director
Dr. Patricia A. Sullivan. Associate Professor of English.

Thomas Newkirk

Dr. Thomas N. Newkirk. Professor of English.

Cinthia L Gannett

Dr. Cinthia L. Gannett. Associate Professor of English

Dr. Sarah Way Sherman. Associate Professor of English

Dr. John N. Erni. Associate Professor of Communication

31 March 2000

Date

DEDICATION

For my sons, Griffith and Rhys: The master storytellers in my life.

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I've had so many generous hands to help me in this project that it is difficult to single out a few for special mention. Still, there are those who have been indispensable to my work, and my mental health, that I do want to take the space to thank. For anyone I may have left out, I ask that you forgive my oversight and accept my thanks.

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PREFACE

To Television

To Television, not a window on the world,
but as we call you,
a box,
a tube,
terrarium of dreams and wonders,
coffer of shades,
ordained cotillion of phosphors or liquid crystal.
Homey miracle.
Tub of acquiescence, vein of defiance.
Your patron in the Pantheon would be Hermes,
Rasterdance,
quick one, little thief, escort of the dying,
and comfort of the sick.
In a blue glow my father and little sisters sat snuggled in one chair watching you.
Their wife and mother was sick in the head.
I scorned you and them, as I scorned so much.
Now I like you best in a hotel room, maybe minutes before I have to face an audience.
Behind the doors of the armoire,
box within a box,
Tom and Jerry,
or also brilliant and reassuring Oprah Winfrey.
Thank you.
For I watch.
I've watched Sid Caesar speaking French and Japanese not through knowledge but imagination,
his quickness, and thank you.
I watched live Jackie Robinson stealing home,
that image, oh, strung shell, enduring, fleeter than light,
like these words we remember in,
they too are winged at the helmet and ankles.

Robert Pinksy

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ABSTRACT

TUNED IN: TELEVISION AND THE TEACHING OF WRITING

by

Bronwyn T. Williams
University of New Hampshire, May, 2000

College writing teachers often consider the reading and writing experiences students have had in elementary and high school classes as their only relevant discursive influences. When they do so they risk ignoring what is perhaps the most powerful and ubiquitous form of public discourse and communication in our society: television. This dissertation explores how the pervasive discourse of popular culture on television influences the ways in which incoming college students perceive and engage in writing and reading when they enter a first-year composition course. Through interviews with students and observations of them watching television, I have studied the skills students have developed that allow them to "read" televised communication so fluently -- even critically -- and examine where those skills converge and conflict with the discursive skills taught in a writing course. On the one hand, student experiences with television provide them with a sophisticated sense of narrative form, audience, plot, and irony, that can be used in a writing class to explore the same concepts in print. Conversely, television as a communicative form structured by time, without a clear authorial presence, and dominated by emotion often conflicts with what writing teachers consider fundamental properties of discourse in the academy such as depth, individual authorship, and detached analysis. I consider what implications such findings have both for the teaching of writing in a first-year composition class and for the way in which we conceive of teaching writing in a world in which communication happens increasingly by electronic and visual means.

INTRODUCTION

I would look at the clock and notice that it was five minutes to the hour and feel the ache of ending. All week I had waited to watch this program on TV and now it was almost over. The program may have changed over the years -- Laugh-In, MASH, Hill Street Blues, Twin Peaks -- and my anticipation may have lost some of its gleeful edge as I grew older and the end of a TV show no longer necessarily signaled bedtime, yet the familiar sadness of ending was always there. I would watch to the last moment, not wanting to miss the funny tag before the credits or, even better, the previews of next week's episode. I clung to those moments of exquisite pleasure and regret, of knowing that once this week's show was over it would be gone -- at least until summer re-runs. I wanted to live more in the moment of television, for the show to go on and on.

I'm still disappointed when "Next week, on The X-Files" turns out to be a re-run.

In my classroom there is a cabinet with a TV and VCR in it. Most days it sits to the side of the chalkboard and I use it mostly to as a place to pile papers and books. If, however, I open the doors to the cabinet during class, I notice a small wave of alertness rippling through the class. The students quit slouching, they lean forward just slightly, and all eyes -- even the ones that had moments before been gazing at the piles of dirty snow outside -- are now directed at the TV set. If I kid them about this shift in interest and attention, they laugh and tell me that they know they shouldn't act this way, after all, it's not as if they like TV better than discussing the essay we read for class, but they can't help themselves. "Why?", I ask. "Why do you say you shouldn't act this way but you can't help yourselves?" It usually takes a while for them to feel as if they can answer, but the answers eventually emerge: Something is happening in the class that they *understand* even before it happens. Television is something they know, that they feel confident about, that they are

sure they will have something to say about. And besides, TV is fun, TV is pleasurable; it isn't serious academic work. So just by opening the cabinet door I have engaged in an activity that feels slightly forbidden. They are going to get away with something in class today -- they are going to get to watch TV. (And sometimes, after all of this discussion, we even get around to watching it.)

It took me a long time even to use the television in the classroom. Like my colleagues, my view was that I was a writing teacher and that all that was permissible in my classroom was the printed word. We would write and read and talk about writing and reading. It was an attitude that was shared by many of my colleagues. Even as I work on this project, when the subject of television comes up among writing teachers, it is often only to lament the amount students watched. "They can't write because they haven't *read* anything!" is but one variation on this complaint. "All they do is watch TV." They then haul out the familiar statistics about televisions running for seven hours a day in an average household, of children spending more time watching television than doing anything else except sleep (McKibben 18), of the 350,000 advertisements (Bagdikian 185), more than 8,000 murders (Huston, et al. 54), and countless other socially damaging acts students will have encountered by the time they enter college. Certainly I won't dispute the assumption that most of our students have spent much more time consuming television programs, movies, and advertisements than they have reading books. I have done more than my share of the hand-wringing that goes along with the latest study that indicates the astounding number of hours a week an "average" young person spends watching television.

My concern, however, is that our response to this phenomenon often begins and ends with hand-wringing and despair. For teachers of writing, popular visual media in general and television in particular are the enemy against which we must necessarily battle in the name of literature and the essay. We see our jobs as enticing them back to the one true faith of print literacy and rarely think about the nature of the visual and cultural

literacies they possess as a result of their long viewing histories. It is similar to the way that English Departments perhaps offer a course in "Popular Culture" within the curriculum, but go to great pains to make clear that such a course is, in the end, a diversion from the important instruction in the high culture of literature. This stance, of defining anything emerging from popular culture -- particularly television -- as not falling within a definition of legitimate cultural capital, begins in grade schools and is reinforced continually through the educational system (Dyson 3). By the time students reach college, they are in no doubt that textual literacy has value and that visual media literacy -- if indeed they are even aware of such an idea -- does not.

This, however, sets up a cognitive dissonance for students who are, at the same time, consuming television in large amounts -- an average of three hours a day according to two recent surveys (Goodstein and Connelly; Kaiser) -- and as a consequence getting most of their information of the world beyond their lived experience from this source. We can't be so foolish as to imagine that there are not consequences to our students' perceptions of these competing and, in the view of the academy, seemingly incompatible literacies. As Michael Hoechsmann contends, the academic world at large continues to behave as if it exists in a world where print is the dominant medium of discourse. Yet, "while literacy still plays a hegemonic role in the allocation of sites in the social hierarchy, it is being supplanted in other spheres by visual codes" (167). At the very least, as educators we need to "confront a decline in the cultural resonance of print literacy" (167). Kathleen Welch makes a similar argument when she says that the rise in television and other electronic media mean we must reexamine the classical canon of delivery in terms of how such media are altering public discourse. "If we continue to lapse into rhetorical unconsciousness, the status quo -- the uselessness of not only rhetoric but of 'the humanities' -- will continue" (36). I agree with Carla Freccero when she notes that most students seem able to read postmodern visual texts more easily and competently than many of their teachers. "They (students) are more at ease with fast-moving fragments of

knowledge and information than those of us who were taught to compose coherent bodies and fields of knowledge from what we learned" (Freccero 4). As writing teachers we can't pretend that living in a society where 96 percent of households in the United States have at least one television set (Borgmann 91) and barely half purchased a single book last year (Scott) is not going to have a fundamental influence on how our students read and write.

I do believe in the value of teaching thoughtful writing and engaging with complex and challenging pieces of reading. I believe that writing offers a medium that can provide a form of profound, nuanced, and provocative information that cannot be replicated in images. I believe that writing can be the basis for invaluable exploration, of the self, of the society, of the world. I love to write and I love to read. I am a teacher of writing. I am a writer. I believe that what I write, be it academic work, fiction, journalism, or my own sorry attempts at poetry enriches and fulfills me in ways that are unique to that activity.

And yet...

I love television -- and not just PBS, as many in the academy are so quick to add. I believe that there are intellectually engaging and provocative works of art on television. I agree with critics who have written persuasively about the high quality of programs from Twin Peaks to Homicide to Hill Street Blues to Frontline. I also know that I don't always choose the intellectually engaging and provocative programs to watch. I am perfectly capable of zoning out in front of what I know to be a mediocre sitcom or The X Files or Sportscenter. As Orson Welles said, "I hate television. I hate it as much as peanuts. But I can't stop eating peanuts" (Columbia). And I don't necessarily hate peanuts.

We'll be right back after this word from our sponsor....

During my senior year of college, my roommate and I had an old TV that was sometimes capable of showing programs in color and sometimes not. We could get two channels with it, the local University PBS affiliate and a local independent station that was home to syndicated re-runs and The Movies Till Dawn. During the course of that

year, watching old episodes of Hawaii Five-O, which came on at midnight, became a ritual for us. (Sure, we watched I, Claudius too, but there was only so much we could handle at midnight.) But we did more than just watch Hawaii Five-O. We interacted with it. We had a sophisticated understanding of the conventions of both the police-show genre and of the contexts of that show in particular. Consequently, our watching included running commentary, satire, and even glib critique. (What was the logic behind McGarrett's order, "Book 'em, Danno. Murder One for starters." For starters? What would come next, creating a public nuisance?) It is not that we were particularly bright or, as the comment above proves, deeply insightful, but like countless others of our generation we could satirize and criticize television programs because we had so much experience about how they worked as both story and discourse.

The first shift in my thinking about writing and television came almost a decade ago during a semester of teaching in England. I was teaching both First-Year Composition and a course in International Film to students who came from countries around the world. It was my first time teaching a film course, and I quickly noticed the significant difference in my students' abilities to "read" print texts and film texts. Students who had a difficult time reading and interpreting a fairly straightforward essay -- including students for whom English was their first language or others with strong English language skills -- could watch a complex, avant-garde film from another culture and engage in a critical, creative, and confident discussion of what they had seen. Once they had been provided with a critical vocabulary through which to view film, their discussions and papers for that course attained a sophistication that eluded some of the same students in the composition course.

After returning to the States I began to notice that students in my First-Year Composition courses were introducing images into their papers. Though it was never part of the assignment, drawings, photographs, cartoons, and, with the advent of the Internet, downloaded images were beginning to appear on the covers of student essays. In recent

years, as software advances made the process even easier, images began to appear embedded in the print of student essays, whether they were memoir, research essays, or critical works. One student's essay about his ambivalent relationship with his father included within it a number of images, downloaded and with print wrapped around them, of fathers and sons reflecting the emotional content of the writing. It was a powerful, yet unsolicited, combination of word and image.

When I again taught in England I began to use film and video in my writing and literature courses as well as my film courses. Though my attempts were fumbling and clumsy, I began to notice that I could occasionally make bridges between my student's literacies in visual electronic media and my attempts to teach them more sophisticated and critical print literacies. (I continue to develop and refine these approaches, some of which I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Five.)

My project for this dissertation is to consider how our students' deep experience with and immersion in television has influenced how they perceive public discourse and how these experiences and perceptions influence their views of what we, as writing teachers, often regard as fundamental properties of reading and writing in the academy such as genre, form, authority, and critical thinking. I also study the skills students have developed that allow them to "read" televised communication so fluently -- and often even critically -- and to consider where those converge and conflict with the discursive skills taught in a First-Year Composition class. I also interviewed and observed selected writing teachers who are beginning to explore new ways of defining composition by thinking about the role of visual media in our world of contemporary communication and even occasionally to bring such media into their writing courses. Finally I consider what implications such findings might have both for the teaching of writing in the first-year composition class and for the way in which we conceive of such a course in a world in which communication happens increasingly by electronic and visual means.

Toward that end I conducted a research project of first-year composition students and teachers at the University of New Hampshire. Through interviews with selected students and their teachers and through observations of the students both in the classroom and during their television-viewing, I studied the critical strategies students used in making meaning out of the television they watched and discussed with their peers. My interest is in exploring the potential articulations between students' skills for engaging with television as discourse and the skills needed to engage with the print literacy of reading and writing in a first-year writing class. I also compare several of the varied rhetorical strategies students encounter on television with some of the rhetorical strategies they encounter in their writing classes. I then examine points of contact, conflict, and convergence.

I am not contending that there are neat and facile causal relationships between what students watch on television and what they produce as writers. Instead my goal is to consider a form of communication and social practice that is so ubiquitous and familiar that it is simultaneously accepted and ignored in the writing classroom. I want to make its influence and presence visible. I want to begin to unwrap and uncover the complicated articulations between television and student writing that exist but are disregarded in our discussions of composition theory and practice.

Don't touch that dial; we'll be right back....

I watched the ghostly figures of Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin bounce about the lunar surface in black and white as I ate a bowl of ice cream. I knew it was an important event and I was trying my best to feel changed as I watched it. But it was, in the end, just another TV show. After a while I walked out into the front yard and looked up at the moon, trying my best to make a connection between what I could see and feel on a muggy July night and the unreal images on the screen. Somehow I couldn't make that connection and, after a while I gave up looking at the moon and went back inside to see what would happen next.

As with most people born from the mid-Fifties on, my memories of the important public events of the day are filtered through the television screen. Or, perhaps more to the point, what was important was defined by what was worthy of interrupting my "regularly scheduled program." Whether it was the Apollo 1 fire, the riots at the Chicago Convention, the King and Kennedy assassinations, or Nixon's resignation, I found out about it, and experienced it, through TV. By the time I was a journalism student in college I was committed to the higher calling of print journalism. Even so, when the bells would go off on the AP wire, alerting us to a plane crash on the Potomac or the assassination of Anwar Sadat, I would rush with the rest of the budding print journalists into the conference room where we would switch on the TV to see what was going on.

Although there are many different kinds of visual media that our students encounter, the question of television is central for three reasons. First, television is ubiquitous in the lives of the majority of people in our society. Not only do many people watch at least some television every day in their domestic spaces, it is also present in public spaces from airports to restaurants to waiting rooms. It is particularly present in public spaces on college campuses such as residence halls and student union lounges. (And, only the year before this project, the University of New Hampshire had wired every residence hall room on campus for cable TV.) As a consequence of this presence, television is one of broadest and most comprehensive cultural forms we encounter. As Michael Saenz notes, "Watching television...institutes a persistent social practice through which audiences carry out considerable rhetorical, political, poetic, cultural work" (573). It is, then, a ubiquitous cultural force that requires of its viewers a way of "reading" that draws both on poetic and rhetorical abilities that are both similar to and different from the ways in which we read texts.

Also, as Neil Postman points out, only television incorporates all forms of public discourse:

> No one goes to a movie to find out about government policy or the latest scientific advances. No one buys a record to find out the baseball scores or the weather or the latest murder. No one turns on radio anymore for soap operas or a presidential address (if a television set is at hand). But everyone goes to a television for all these things and more, which is why television resonates so powerfully throughout the culture. Television is our culture's principal mode of knowing about itself (92).

Television also offers these forms of discourse in ways that, more powerfully than even broadly read print texts such as magazines or newspapers, reorganizes its audiences perceptions of the sociology of knowledge surrounding an issue. Where print texts often work on a more intimate level and the discussion of them is perceived to reveal individual tastes and sensibilities, discussions of television programs are often less centered on the individual's tastes and more likely to be perceived as "topical commentary on perceived social facts -- both the social facts existing as TV programming, and other social facts dominated by TV's content" (Saenz 574).

Finally, television presents a wide range of rhetorical approaches including persuasion (panel discussions to sales pitches), explanation and description (news programs and documentaries), and confession (talk shows). Over-arching all of these, of course, is narrative.

My goal, however, is not to replace reading and writing with a curriculum of sitcoms and music videos. Instead I want to make writing teachers more aware of and responsive to certain critical discursive abilities their students possess, but that have generally been dismissed and ignored. Television is continually changing our cultural discourse. As Michael Saenz points out:

> Television remains a central institution in cultural formation because it offers socially prominent, narrative, and rhetorical touchstones which (much like religion) coordinate the specific historicity of its viewers without determining their entire way of life. It is an ideological, hegemonic, narrational intervention -- but a partial and ambiguous, hardly total one (578).

Saenz touches on both the importance and the difficulty of this project. Television is undoubtedly an influential cultural and discursive force for our students and ourselves.

Still, because of the ways in which it blurs the lines between public and private, because of the ways in which it both appropriates and disrupts genres, because, in a certain way, of its very ubiquitousness, it is difficult to determine precisely where its influence begins and ends. Is it possible to read a student paper, point to one paragraph or rhetorical move and say with any confidence that it has been directly influenced by television? Perhaps not. On the other hand, is it possible to read a student paper and imagine that the writer's central discursive influences do not include television? Probably not. Can we, in conversations about the ways in which we make meaning from television and the ways in which we make meaning from print texts, begin a responsible search for new ways of conceiving how we communicate in both words and images? That is what I hope to illustrate in this study.

When I walk in to a first-year composition course, I am not able to check my television influences at the door, and neither can my students. Yet for years I taught writing courses as if they existed in an media-free zone, pretending that what we were reading and writing was connected only to previous print texts we had encountered or our lived experiences. I am convinced that I am not alone among writing teachers in taking such an approach. Yet few among the teachers and students in any writing classroom can claim to be completely beyond the influence of television. Consequently, it strikes me as disingenuous for us to pretend that television as a discursive influence is not present in the classroom with us.

It also seems disingenuous to me for critics to defend watching television by extolling the virtues of the high-quality shows I have mentioned above such as Hill Street Blues or Frontline or The Singing Detective when programs with such intricate and intelligent writing are clearly not the norm on any given night of programming; nor are such shows usually the most popular on television. For most people, a banal show such as The Brady Bunch -- still popular in re-runs more than twenty years after its original broadcasts -- is, given its familiarity and repetition, probably a more important factor in our culture than Twin Peaks or Homicide. Indeed, the very nature of popular culture

should make us wary of easy distinctions between the "good" and the "popular." As Bill McKibben notes, "People don't watch TV the way critics have to watch it" (15) Nor should we assume that students always watch television the way that we, as their teachers, do.

That our students do not watch television in the same way as we do may or may not be true. When they watch television, however, students often employ a critical eye toward what they watch and why they are watching it that belies the stereotype of vegged-out teenagers sprawled in front of the set letting the images wash over them in unstoppable waves. Saenz's contention that television watching requires a "self-conscious working out of hegemonic and historical positions, within the gestures of narration and aesthetic rhetorical appreciation" (578) is one that I believe is often supported by student comments. As I will illustrate in this project, students I interviewed made distinctions between "active" watching of shows that matter to them and "passive" watching in which they are using the television for background noise or wallpaper. They made distinctions about programs they want to watch regularly -- and why -- and the times when they do simply sit down in front of the television for an evening of binge watching. They could articulate what qualifies as a good television program and a bad television program. They made considered decisions about what to believe and what not to believe, about what is worth watching and what is a waste of time, about whether a program is for entertainment or information. They recognized that television provides them with a common ground for conversation with their friends and, though they don't use this terminology, that it provides them with many of what they consider their important cultural referents -- referents that influence their writing both directly and indirectly. It is so common for me to read student papers that contain references to television programs, references that the students automatically assume I will understand, for explanation or supporting evidence or to describe real people by comparing them with fictional, on-screen characters that I no

longer find it at all surprising. Indeed, what would surprise me more would the be the use of a piece of literature as such a referent.

It is a mistake simply to dismiss these visual media literacies, and our students' and our own deep immersion in them, as unimportant or absolutely antithetical to what we do as writing teachers. We need only to look at USA Today or People -- or the changes in the last decade in The New York Times for that matter -- to see the influence of television on the textual world. Closer to our academic homes, a comparison of Introductory Psychology textbooks over the past two decades illustrates quite clearly the impact of visual forms on texts. (Interestingly, however, while writing handbooks have developed much more sophisticated forms of visual presentation in recent years, composition readers, by contrast, tend to present page after page of print with few if any graphic innovations.) In making it clear to our students, explicitly and implicitly, that forms of visual literacy such as television are of no value and that instead they are making them passive and dull, we miss an opportunity to draw on a deep and untapped body of discursive experience that we can use to connect students with the world of words and writing and to envision how best to approach new forms of communication such as hypertext. Their exposure to visual media has given our students a supple and complex ability to read and analyze images and narratives. Even when they are given an unfamiliar and complicated photograph or scene from a film or image from an advertisement, they can read and respond to it with a vigor, depth, and thoroughness that is usually much harder for them to display with an essay or poem. This form of literacy may difficulty for them to articulate in academically acceptable critical language when they enter our classrooms -- though no more so than the print literacies they do possess -- but it is extensive and offers us a different place to begin as teachers of writing.

As teachers we often take if for granted that print literacy is culturally and intellectually superior. We somehow assume that our students will agree with us because of the self-evident superiority of our claim. In fact, our students often will tell us that they

too agree that print literacy is intellectually superior and that television is trash and brain candy that has no place in a college classroom. Yet if our students truly agree with us on this, why do so many of them prefer television to reading, prefer the visual to print? Why, in the Literacy Narratives I have my students write about their reading and writing histories, do so many of them, even when writing for an English class, profess to preferring television to reading and writing? Why do students I talk with say that television and film are more authoritative, more trustworthy than writing?

We now interrupt your regularly scheduled program for this special report...

It isn't easy to acknowledge a love for, or even interest in, television. I get defensive and slightly embarrassed even when discussing "high-quality" television I have watched such as Hill Street Blues or Northern Exposure or Twin Peaks or I, Claudius or MASH or Homicide or such amazing and provocative work as The Singing Detective or Pennies From Heaven. Still, I can point to those programs as examples of exceptional and often daring writing, directing, and acting.

I can probably bring myself to admit to watching The X-Files or Buffy, The Vampire Slayer. Yet even as I do that I imagine the disapproving voices of my readers saying, "How can he watch so much television? It dulls the brain so. I never watch anything aside from Jane Austen adaptations on Masterpiece Theatre." And I hang my head in shame for watching television at all, let alone enjoying it.

I too realize that much of television is terrible, inane, not worth the waste of time. Even so, I have wasted my time watching TV. I have had the TV on while I wrote checks and, yes, even while I graded student papers. And when I was first out of college, alone and working in a new city, I would have the television on for company just as my father would do hundreds of miles away where he sat, disabled, in his bedroom waiting for my mother to get home from work.

Like all the other writing teachers I know, I wish many of my students had read more, would read more willingly, and would love writing and reading as much as they love watching television. What I also know is that my students aren't about to make a leap from television to writing and reading simply because I tell them they should. If I want to move them toward a more critical and intellectually challenging engagement with print literacy as well as with their visual media literacy, I have to think more carefully about how they perceive the form of public discourse with which they are most familiar -- television -- in the same way that I would be a less effective ESL teacher if I gave no thought to the language and culture of origin of my students.

More often than not, however, we do not address television as discourse in our writing courses. This does not come as a surprise. If we weren't devoted to the printed word, we wouldn't be in these jobs in the first place. We believe in the power and magic of the written word and marvel at the supple and often beautiful purposes for which it can be used. Not only are we devoted to print, but we find ourselves drawn to a particular kind of print discourse imperfectly described as the "essay." Even if we disagree about precisely what constitutes an "essay" or "academic" writing, however, we do regard it as a form that includes exposition, rationality, reflection, insight, analysis, perceptiveness, and intelligence. These are the qualities we value in printed discourse as well as the academy in general. These are not qualities we would use to describe most of what we see on television, a discursive form that privileges narrative, emotion, resolution, repetition, and ease of understanding. Indeed, as Cynthia Selfe notes, "Many teachers of English composition feel it (technology) antithetical to their primary concerns and many believe it should not be allowed to take up valuable scholarly time or the attention that could be best put to use in teaching or the study of literacy" (412).

In fact I find myself unable to shake a certain unease whenever I have to describe this project to others. How will I convince them that this is a matter worthy of serious study? How to allay their fears about the further intrusion of television into the cherished

realm of print? How to make it clear that, though I am involved in studying television, I also read and write and do my best to be a serious scholar? Our culturally constructed responses to the idea of television and the idea of print are powerful ideological forces shaping the ways in which we conceive of how best to teach the kind of print literacy we prize. As Selfe again writes, "We are much more used to dealing with older technologies like print, a technology conventional enough so that we don't have to think so much about it, old enough so that it doesn't call such immediate attention to the social or material conditions associated with its use" (413).

Part of the focus of this project, then, is to trace, from a cultural studies perspective, the social, political, and cultural forces that shape our perceptions of television and of teaching writing as cultural form and social practices. I consider how both television and composition as a field are constructed as cultural forms and social practices, what ideological forces shape the way we and our students experience each of them. I then examine how, when those cultural forms come into contact with one another as they inevitably do on a modern college campus, those collisions often shape our students' perceptions of reading and writing and our perceptions of our students in ways that we have yet to carefully investigate. Though we may try to exclude television and other forms of popular culture from our writing courses, neither we nor our students can check it at the classroom door like a winter coat and then put it on again when we leave. John Schlib, in making the case for a cultural studies approach to composition, argues that "True literacy means examining one's society, not simply manipulating surface features of text" (187). If television remains a detested and demeaned cultural form in the writing classroom, then we consign it to students for their use without analysis or critique (Freccero 4). I look at the reasons why we, in the context of composition, respond so negatively to the idea of television and try our best to keep it at the classroom door.

The problem with this approach is that when we shut the door on television we shut out of the classroom a broad range of discursive skills. All of these skills may not be

useful in a writing classroom; but we have done very little in composition to try to determine the nature of these visual media literacy skills and what the articulations might be with the writing and reading skills we have thought and theorized so deeply about. When we do bring popular cultural forms into the writing classroom, we often do so only as a way of providing students with a more hip and seemingly relevant subject matter to write traditional essays about. We rarely use it as a way of teaching print literacy itself.

The other branch of this project, then, is to consider the discursive and rhetorical skills students possess as a result of their broad experiences in watching television. Some of these may be transferable to the first-year composition classroom and others may be antithetical to what we want to teach. Either way, I believe they are influencing the ways in which our students write and read and that we must begin to uncover the nature of those influences. When we do we will find intriguing articulations that will allow us to reconsider and reinvigorate our approaches to teaching print literacy -- as well as the nature of print literacy itself. Irony, for example, is easy to find on television from David Letterman to Seinfeld to The Simpsons. It is equally as easy to find in our students in regard to what they see on television. John Leonard says that "Those millions of younger Americans who sit still each week for Melrose Place are so self-consciously ironic you'd think they were Jorge Luis Borges or Italo Calvino" (258). The question for me, however, is what can we do with such a finely honed and lightning-quick sense of irony? Can we recognize and develop it in ways that help student writers move from irony to critique? Can we build a bridge from the one-liner to critical analysis? I think we can. I believe if we consider the possible articulations between television as discourse and print as discourse we can "share with our students the power produced by switching genres and defying conventions" (Bialostosky 17).

I do not consider this project to provide definitive answers to the nature of the conflicts and articulations posed by these competing discourses. I would, however, like this work to open a conversation about how we might reconsider our pedagogical

approaches in order to draw on students' -- and our own -- deep experiences with television as discourse as we teach them the print literacies we value. It may also allow us to think about how this visual media discourse may create opportunities for investigating and invigorating new forms of communication that combine both word and image such as hypertext and multi-genre writing.

Coming up after the break, how the project was done....

I heard the Captain Kangaroo theme song one day and was transported back to childhood as if I had caught the scent of my grandmother's chocolate cake. Along with Mr. Moose and the ping pong balls, some of my clearest memories of that program were the books the captain read. Stone Soup, Mike Mulligan and the Steam Shovel. They were books I then wanted to read myself. I have watched a great deal of television in my life, enough that I can sing the theme songs to Gilligan's Island, The Brady Bunch, and Spiderman as confidently as any songs I know. This means I have probably watched too much television -- or at least I feel as if I should say that I have watched too much television. I should be quiet about, or at least ashamed of, the kinds of revelations I just made.

On the other hand, I grew up in a house of books, public affairs, and non-stop debate on the issues of the day. I have read Dante and Shakespeare and Homer and Ovid and Petrarch and Twain and Conrad and Woolf and Joyce and Wright and Morrison and Rushdie. I love Mozart operas and I go ga-ga over the work of Cezanne. Did television rot my brain? Has the time I've spent in front of the tube been, by its nature, wasteful? Would I have been better off reading the pulp science fiction novels I devoured when I was not watching Star Trek or Lost in Space re-runs simply because the books were in print?

I let my children watch television. Not all the time. And they do love to read, alone or with their mother and me. Yet I have never regretted letting them watch Sesame

Street or even their current favorite, Bill Nye, the Science Guy. And I have never regretted watching those shows with them for I have learned as much as they have. Both of those programs are unabashed about their use of television conventions -- from parody advertisements to fast-cut editing to fragmented narratives. Both programs are also intelligent, witty, and have continually provoked further thought and conversation in our family. I know the criticisms from Postman and others that such shows make learning too "entertaining" and don't train children in the pure, straightforward kind of educational practices they need to learn. I don't buy it. I watch my children move from a Bill Nye show about the weather to a book about tornadoes and back again. I watch them read a book and then plan to make a film out of it; or watch a movie and then write stories based on the characters in the film. I wonder why being entertained by the wondrous words and pictures of Dr. Seuss is acceptable, but being entertained by the words and pictures of Sesame Street is not.

Of course there is bad children's television and we have always been careful about what we let them watch. No Power Rangers. No Beast Wars. And most of all, no Barney.

In this project, I wanted to start with the students. I agree with Carol Severino that too often student views are conspicuously absent from work that addresses issues of popular culture and student writing. "Much could be learned from interviews with students about their own political and literacy backgrounds, using the ethnographic methods that Freire and composition scholars recommend to literacy workers" (82). For me it was politically important in this project to begin with students rather than simply to treat them as ill-informed dupes of dominant ideological forces. Instead of standing comfortably atop an aesthetic and moral high ground, as some writing teachers do, to tell my students why they are wrong to like television and why they would be better off preferring print literacy, my pedagogical and rhetorical approaches demanded that I begin with an investigation of

the values to which my audience --in this case students -- adheres (Perelman) and how best I might identify with those values (Burke) before I could begin to engage them in a conversation that could help them think critically about both visual and print literacies. Inevitably, then, it was students' perceptions and how they make meaning that form the backbone of this study. I have also drawn from some of the methodological philosophies of qualitative researchers in composition and literacy (Blakeslee, Cole, and Confrey; McCarthy and Fishman) in terms of bringing the voices of research subjects more directly into my writing and of Participatory Action Researchers in sociology and social psychology (Park, et al.) in terms guiding my sense of the ownership of the knowledge that has been created through this project and how it will be used. As much as is possible I attempted to provide a more participatory atmosphere for the project where the people I interviewed not only had chance to speak but felt as if they had a stake in the information produced from this project.

The information I sought was not the kind I could foresee revealing itself through observation alone. Because television is such a ubiquitous and integral part of the weave of our culture, it is easy for us to take for granted its role in our lives. I needed the time that having conversations with the students allowed for reflection and thought about how they engaged with television in terms of perceptions and meaning. My interviews included asking participants to describe their viewing and reading and writing practices and to explain what motivated their choices of what they watch and read. I asked them about their perceptions of television and of writing and reading; which they felt were enjoyable, which they disliked, which were most authoritative, which were most effective and in what way, and so on. I also watched television programs with them and asked them to comment on how they make meaning from the program. I had similar conversations with them about writing and reading assignments in their first-year composition classes.

I address more fully the details of my methodology in Chapter Two as I consider the material gathered in the interviews.

It is also important to be clear about what I mean when I say I am approaching this project from a "cultural studies" perspective. Cultural studies often gets used as a short-hand for simply studying popular culture texts or bringing them into the higher education classroom. I want to make clear that I see cultural studies as more than a simplistic cultural populism. I do in fact believe it important that cultural studies define culture without artificial boundaries of high and low but instead as encompassing all of the institutions, creative and communicative practices, and beliefs of a society. I also believe that these forms of cultural production need to be interpreted and evaluated in relation to historical and social structures (Nelson, et al. 4). Composition, as a field, is in many ways well positioned to employ cultural studies as a theoretical framework. As in composition, cultural studies is defined by its interdisciplinary nature and its use of multiple methods of inquiry, moving back and forth between the acts and perceptions of the individual and the way those acts and perceptions are constructed or constrained by larger social forces. Such a critique of cultural forms and practices, however, is incomplete without a consideration of how such forces are shaped by, and in turn shape, relations of power within a society. Cultural studies then must not only focus on what it means to be in and know about a culture, but must also have an explicit political analysis of the forces that create and sustain cultural forms and practices and constrain potential change within the culture.

For this project, then, there are three general implications of studying the questions of television and the teaching of writing from a cultural studies approach. First, it means employing a critique of social practices and power relations not only of students' relationships with television, but also of their relationships with the composition classroom. This requires a continual challenge of the implicit high culture/low culture divide that exists in much of composition. Also a cultural studies approach means studying television and composition not as free-standing comparative phenomena, but instead paying close attention to the social context within which both operate and intersect as

cultural practices. I must consider the historical and social structures that define the purpose and the reception of both television and of work in the composition classroom, not in isolation from one another, but in constant -- if often unrecognized -- contact. Finally, using a cultural studies approach means examining the cultural practices that have created in composition and in English studies such hostility and disdain for popular culture in general and for television in particular. What are the political and social forces that have influenced the formation and perpetuation of composition as a field and what is at stake politically if the social and cultural practices that currently define composition are challenged?

Stay tuned for scenes of how this project will be presented....

Not long ago I was zapping through the fifty-some choices on the local cable when I came across a shot on ESPN's Classic Sports network that stopped me cold. There was Bob Gibson, glaring at Jim Northrup of the Detroit Tigers in the first game of the 1968 World Series. Gibson set a record that day by striking out seventeen batters; I know because I raced home from school in time to watch most of it. So, yes, again I was thrown back into memories of watching baseball and basketball games with my father, soap operas with my grandmother when she visited in the summer, and Marx Brothers' movies late on Saturday nights with my father and brother. What surprised me, however, as I watched Gibson throw another deadly slider to strike out Al Kaline was that I could have sworn that I watched that broadcast in color. Yet here it was, on Classic Sports, in black and white. And I watched the whole thing and darn it if Gibson didn't strike out 17 all over again.

I was also surprised by how alluring the idea of the Classic Sports Network was to me. After all, sports events are the rare unscripted television programs. They appeal, in part, because they are not guaranteed to end with a satisfying resolution. Even the greatest players lose from time to time, or surmount impossible odds to win. If you missed

the crucial moments, you missed that experience and had to be satisfied with highlights on the news. Until now, once the game was over, you knew you would never see it again. There would be no summer re-run, no endless syndication. My father, who loved watching sports but was driven to distraction by the uncertainty of the outcome for his favorite team, would have loved Classic Sports.

Now there is a channel for people who want to wallow in the nostalgia of a game from some long ago NCAA Men's Basketball Championship without bothering with any attendant anxiety or who will look up from the newspaper just in time for the exciting parts they know are coming. Sometimes, to the puzzlement of my wife, I continue to be one of those people, even as I shake my head at the idea of people who watch the all-home-decorating-and-remodeling-all-the-time channel. Isn't it nice that we can all have channels to fulfill our own guilty obsessions?

In the first chapter I chart both the wariness of those in composition with new forms of electronic communication and the implicit agenda in many first-year composition courses of using the class, in part, to inoculate students against the influences of popular culture. I also discuss the evolving sense of what constitutes a "text" and "discourse" and how those definitions differ in terms of television and print. Finally, I examine how television operates as a cultural form and social practice and how that often places it in direct conflict with the values privileged in a composition course..

Chapter Two turns the focus to the interviews I conducted with students about their television viewing and reading and writing histories and preferences. In this chapter I explore the rhetorical skills such as interpreting form, audience, and style, that students have developed through watching television and illustrate where those are connected with the rhetorical skills we try to teach in writing classrooms. The interviews that form the backbone of this chapter provide ways of reconsidering the rhetorical knowledge students, even those who do not consider themselves good writers, bring to a writing classroom.

Yet the influence of television in the writing classroom is not always so beneficial. In Chapter Three I examine where composition and television, as cultural forms, come into conflict. There are three key areas I have highlighted: Time and Speed, Authorship and Authority, and Purpose and Emotion. By considering and understanding the nature of these conflicts, we may be better able to understand our students' unfamiliarity, anxiety, and even resistance, to the kinds of skills and values we teach in writing classrooms. This chapter also includes information from student interviews.

Chapter Four, then, explores the strategies students use in making meaning out of the television they watch and then discuss with their peers. Through observations of watching and discussing television with students I look at how students decode and interpret television as a visual and commercial form of communication. I also examine how students focus on the use of plot on television. Finally, I look at how television is constructed as an element of class status and how that can influence students coming to writing courses with sophisticated television literacies, but weak print literacies.

The final chapter explores the implications from this research for how composition is taught and how our definition of it may need to evolve in the future. I would like this work to open a conversation about how we might reconsider our pedagogical approaches in order to draw on our students' deep experiences with television as discourse as we teach them the print literacies we value. It may also allow us to create opportunities for investigating and invigorating new forms of writing in the academy such as hypertext, multi-genre research, and media criticism.

As teachers we are seemingly faced with the choices of either asking students to reject this powerful form of public discourse that to them is more meaningful and important and comprehensible than what we offer -- and expect either conversion or resistance -- or of giving in to it. Yet even as we think we are teaching the print discourse we privilege, it comes to our students filtered through the discourse conventions of a

mass-mediated culture. In a sense we are teaching in a mass-media contact zone with our students and getting, as a result, contact-zone texts that befuddle both us and them. Their attempts at mimicry can result at least in hybrid writing that resists our readings or, in a more overt resistance, mock the discourse we are promoting. This in turn challenges our most cherished meta-narrative of literacy as empowerment, of literacy as the fundamental requirement for critical consciousness in a civil society. What we see as the fundamental strength of the kind of written discourse we teach is resisted and undermined.

Obviously such a Manichean approach to this situation is bound to fail -- and easy to criticize. Too often, however, it is just such a binary that is presented again and again in college writing courses. Though a mass-mediated electronic culture, a maelstrom of images with no true referents, may in many ways be at odds with what we try to do as writers and as teachers of writing, it is a form of discourse that is a crucial influence for our students. If we are to teach them the discursive forms that we privilege, with their ideas of *ethos* and *logos* and thoughtfulness and reflection, we need to understand the nature of this televised discourse and how it is different from our own. If we can view television as discourse, instead of simply the enemy, we can examine and re-define for our students, and ourselves, notions of authority, reality, representation, critique, reflexivity, consequence, originality, and writing in ways that will be more meaningful. As John Trimbur points out, "the evolution of the study and teaching of writing has taken place by and large in isolation from the study of the mass media, popular culture, and communication theory" (131). If, however, we can approach the medium our students know so well and reveal its discursive practices, then we may also discover the intersections that will allow us to make a bridge to a more sophisticated print literacy. If we view our teaching of writing as part of an effort to "balance the semiosis of contemporary life against the lived and living experience of individuals and groups" (127), and we include a consideration of forms of visual media discourse, we may help students

move beyond the cacophony of voices that bombard them daily and to develop a critical literacy of words and images.

Stay tuned...

CHAPTER I

A SOCIAL INOCULATION: TELEVISION'S PLACE IN THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

I know a lot of composition teachers who love Sven Birkerts' collection of essays, The Guttenberg Elegies. They share his love of the printed word and the extended work of prose as well as his fears concerning the effects of electronic communication on our willingness to read such works. They agree with him when he notes that the students he has taught in recent years are not, "with a few exceptions, readers -- never had been; that they had always occupied themselves with music, TV, and videos; that they had difficulty slowing down enough to concentrate on prose of any density" (19). For Birkerts, the consequence of this shift from print to electronic communication is a society that has been "stripped not only of familiar habits and ways, but of familiar points of moral and psychological reference" (21). On most days, the composition teachers I know are an optimistic lot (for they certainly aren't doing the job for the money or prestige) and would probably not follow Birkerts to this rather dire position, though they often use his essays in their classes. Yet even as they remain committed to developing a more sophisticated and critical print literacy in their students, they also are uneasy about the influences of electronic media in general and television in particular on their students' abilities to read and write.

If they like what Birkerts has to say, I found that even carrying a copy of Mitchell Stephens' The Rise of the Image The Fall of the Word was enough to make my friends avert their eyes and recoil ever so slightly. It is the attitude Cynthia Selfe describes when she notes that, as a field, we in composition are humanists and, as humanists, we maintain a distrust of technology (412). Of course there are some daring sorts who are making

forays into the world of computer-mediated-communication both in and out of the classroom -- of which Selfe is an admirable example. Even she admits, however, that these are exceptions in the composition community. Most of us, as college writing teachers, know that electronic communication in the form of television, video, and computers is creating a rapidly shifting discursive landscape. All too often, however, our response to these shifts is to dig in our heels, read Birkerts, and mount a rearguard attack in defense of the print literacy of the essay, poem, and novel. It is an approach encapsulated in the words of one friend and colleague when I described this project to her. "But there isn't a conflict between television and teaching writing," she said. "Because our job is draw them away from the television and show them how much richer and fulfilling good writing will be for them." This friend is gifted teacher and a forceful personal presence and is, I have no doubt, successful in doing just what she describes. That her position is not an uncommon one, either today or in the history of our field, raises the questions I want to address in this chapter. Before I discuss what students have told me of their perceptions of television and of writing and reading and before I discuss the interaction and conflict between television and writing in a first-year composition classroom, I want to examine how views of writing and popular culture are presented in composition. In this chapter I want to consider first the relationship between composition and television as social practices. What are the values and assumptions on which each is constructed and how do those shape what happens and why? If we can begin by examining where composition and television are in contact, and sometimes in conflict, as social practices, we can then see the places where students and their teachers may often be at odds without even knowing it. This framework is vital to understanding the conversations I had with students about television and writing.

A Wariness of "Cultural Strangeness"

Selfe contends that we turn our back on new technologies of electronic communication because of the "cultural strangeness" we feel when we are confronted with them too directly (413). We find refuge in print because of its familiarity and conventional status. "At this point in history, books are relatively cheap, they are generally accessible to students and to us, and they are acknowledged by our peers to be the appropriate tools of teaching and learning to use" (413). This allows us to ignore, most of the time, the ideological underpinnings of print literacy and the implication of such a cultural system for our students and ourselves.

Selfe makes her case about the response of writing teachers to new technologies in the name of acknowledging the place of the computer in the world of composition. Though her point is persuasive, it is also not going to be a huge leap to imagine the increasing use of computers in the teaching of writing. Most of us and most of our students already write with computers as well as use e-mail and surf the Web. Within the field of composition there are already professional groups organized around the use of computers as well as numerous scholarly articles and books, textbooks, software, and the journal Computers in Composition. As a culture we have accepted that computers are legitimate instructional tools; even if, as Selfe contends, we are not paying careful enough attention to how they are being developed and used for teaching.

If we remain, on the whole, uncomfortable addressing the implications of computers on how we teach writing, many of us can at least imagine that such technology could be used in the effective and proper teaching of writing. By contrast, television, as a technology, as a form of discourse, plays a very small role in any discussions about composition theory and practice. We draw an impermeable line between "reading" print and "watching" television. The first is the essential form of academic discourse; the latter is a mind-killing activity that people, particularly our students, engage in when they should be reading the fine works we have assigned in that day's classes. One is a valuable

intellectual endeavor, the other is a worthless waste of time. It is a position perhaps best exemplified by Neil Postman's popular discussion of public discourse, Amusing Ourselves to Death, which Postman presents as a "lamentation about the most significant American cultural fact of the second half of the twentieth century: the decline of the Age of Typography and the ascendancy of the Age of Television" (8). Though we may not be as explicit about our discomfort as Postman, at some level many of us -- including myself -- join him as he laments such a shift in the nature of communication.

Such an uneasy and somewhat reactionary response is not unusual among the intellectual establishment when faced with a new technology or genre of communication. In Plato's Phaedrus, Socrates famously denounces the rise of the printed word and the decline of the oral tradition. Print, he says, will offer students "the appearance of wisdom, not true wisdom, for they will read many things without instruction and will therefore seem to know many things, when they are for the most part ignorant and hard to get along with, since they are not wise, but only appear wise" (Plato 38). The widespread use of paper over parchment was denounced in medieval Europe and in 1231 Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II would not allow the suspicious new substance to be used for official documents (Stephens 31). In the Fifteenth Century the printing press was also disparaged as a less intellectually rigorous, and potentially dangerous, technology. In such intellectual centers as Venice and Florence it was denounced. The abbot and bibliographer Trithemius of Sponheim said that "Printed books will never be the equivalent of handwritten codices" (qtd in Stephens 33) because printers lacked the discipline and diligence of scribes (33). The resistance to these new technologies of communication often centered around either the speed and volume with which new and perhaps dangerous ideas would become available to a mass audience or that they would provide less intellectually rigorous diversions for the public. In the Nineteenth Century the telegraph was criticized for both undermining authority in the family as well as contributing to public nervousness because of its emphasis on speed (Stamberg). At about the same time The Nation criticized the use

of photographs in newspapers as infantile (Stephens 31). As Stephens notes, "We rarely trust the imposition of a new magic on our lives, and we rarely fail to work up nostalgia for the older magic it replaces" (32).

Similar reactions often greet the emergence or increasing popularity of a new genre. Plato decried the poets in his Republic because they worked on the emotions of their audiences, not through the intellectual discipline of dialectic. In the Eighteenth Century novels were widely condemned as being mindless and addictive diversions, potentially harmful to young and impressionable readers. In the Nineteenth Century in the US it was newspapers that were taken to task for providing too much cheap entertainment in too unsophisticated a form (Paine 283). The complaints about television stretch back to its earliest days and include Federal Communications Commission Chairman Newton Minow's famous 1961 denunciation of television as a "vast wasteland."

The response to the development of new technologies and genres in the field of composition has also often been apprehensive or even reactionary -- particularly when those new forms manifested themselves in popular culture. Indeed the distrust of popular culture forms and the duty of those in composition to provide, through writing, a social inoculation against the deleterious influences of such forms dates to the inception of first-year composition as a requirement for incoming students. The development of the first first-year composition course at Harvard in the Nineteenth Century was grounded, among other reasons, on a desire to gives students what A.S. Hill at the time considered the "moral stamina" to resist the influences of what was then considered the scourge of popular culture: newspapers. As Charles Paine points out, "Mass culture for Hill resembled a kind of infection, against which rhetorical training could provide inoculation, a means of resisting mass culture" (283) Hill was not alone is his concerns about mass culture, nor about the mission of the new American university to address those concerns. Charles William Eliot, who became president of Harvard in 1869, saw composition and literature as central to rectifying the deficient values and attitudes of the American public

(Miller 50). Hill believed that newspapers -- through their use of clichés, their emphasis on speed and brevity, and their easy availability to the public at large -- were weakening his students' capacities for critical thought and expression. This resulted in a "tedious mediocrity" of student compositions that attempted, either consciously or unconsciously, to emulate the discourse of popular culture (292). The role of the teacher of writing, then, was in part to make students aware of the limitations and intellectual weakness of popular cultural discourse and provide them with the rhetorical training to both resist the allure of popular culture to use their own rhetorical skills to promote the social good. As Paine notes, Hill believed that "composition could help American youth step outside their culture, resist it, and slowly but steadily alter it" (295). This is a conception of composition that would not seem too strange to many writing teachers today: that our job is in part to help students learn, through writing, how to discover the true intellectual selves that will allow them to resist and transcend the banality of popular cultural discourse.

To a certain extent Hill's fortifying and redemptive view of composition was ahead of its time. In the 1920s John Dewey also lamented the influence of popular culture on intelligent discourse, this time in the realm of politics and civic life. He wrote, "The members of an incohate public have too many ways of enjoyment, as well as of work, to give much thought to organization into an effective public" (qtd in Aronowitz 74). The problem for Dewey was not that there were forms of entertainment, but that "access to means of amusement has been rendered easy and cheap beyond anything known in the past" (qtd in Aronowitz 74). The answer, of course, to the influence of mass popular culture, was education. In terms of education for much of the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries, it was literature more than composition that was promoted as the source of the cultural inoculation against mass culture. F.R. Leavis and Denys Thompson, in 1933 wrote

> Those who in school are offered (perhaps) the beginnings of education in taste are exposed out of school to the competing exploitation of the cheapest emotional responses: films, newspapers, publicity in all its forms, commercially catered fiction -- all offering satisfaction at its lowest level, and inculcate the choosing of the most immediate pleasure, got with the least effort (qtd in Trimbur "Whatever Happened").

The answer for Leavis and Thompson was to provide an education of reading and analysis, not just of literature but of mass media as well, that would equip students faced with such a flood of mass media to "discriminate and resist" (Trimbur, "Whatever Happened").

Even today, neither composition nor English studies overall, have much good to say about the visual in general or television in particular. A debate at the 1996 NCTE Board of Directors' meeting concerning a resolution recognizing the study and discussion of visual literacy became a debate about whether the two words "visual" and "literacy" could even be considered in any way connected (Childers, et al. ix). This is echoed in John Richardson's comment that "to speak of visual literacy would be to utter an oxymoron" (qtd in Garrett-Petts and Lawrence 2).

Distrust of popular culture and the need for first-year composition courses to provide a social inoculation against popular cultural forces, specifically television in this case, transcends other political differences among composition theorists. Though motivations and methods may differ, there is a consistent construction of students as passive, uncritical consumers of the media and of their teachers as the bearers of superior political and cultural values (Buckingham and Sefton-Green 212). From such a position, then, the teaching of writing is regarded as a way of helping students defend themselves against the crude, anti-intellectual, and seductive world of popular culture. Edward Lotto argues that television viewing has produced students whose use of language and thought is less developed than those of previous generations (1989). Wayne Booth asserts that, "The video arts tell us precisely what we should see, but their resources are thin and cumbersome for stimulating our moral and philosophical range" (qtd in Nehamas 415).

Mark Rocha says that if a student, "is to become a successful *adult* writer (Rocha's emphasis), he will need to overcome the television-ization of his critical capacity to examine received values" (27) Conservative critics such as Allan Bloom and E.D. Hirsh have made well-publicized assaults on television and popular culture. Though Hirsch puts "telescope" on his famous list of what "literate" people should know, he does not include television or any television reference other than "Archie Bunker" (Heath 282). From this traditional liberal humanist position, writing essays and reading literature continue to encourage a sensitivity to language, culture and humanity while popular culture and television can only manipulate helpless students into accepting cheap, false, and transient values.

On the other end of the political spectrum, when television *is* discussed or studied in college composition classrooms, it is almost always in terms of helping students to protect themselves from its insidious cultural, and specifically capitalist, influences. James Berlin, for example, sees the study of television as a necessary step in helping students "negotiate and resist the cultural codes championed in the programs they watch" (123). Karen Fitts and Alan France characterize their students' perceptions of television as "simplistic" and "naive" (19). Kay Ellen Rutledge also warns that, "Music videos, televised bombings, glib advertisements for liquor, tobacco, cars, clothes, cosmetics, or cereals proclaim the decline of the word and the power of the image in our rhetorical environment" (204). These images, according to Rutledge, are the products of "professionals" such as advertising experts and government propagandists who use images and television as a way to "distort reality" and "pervert truth" (204). Joseph Harris and Jay Rosen maintain that though television "encourages a kind of listlessness, a dullness of mind and spirit," that the writing classroom "can reverse these conditions, bringing students together face-to-face as speakers and listeners who can verify, validate, and in some cases contest one another's reactions to TV" (63).

Harris and Rosen and others are not alone in creating composition courses that, using a cultural studies approach, expand the idea of "text" to cover virtually everything a culture invests with meaning. Berlin in Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures outlines such a course, as do the contributors in Miss Grundy Doesn't Teach Here Anymore: Popular Culture and the Composition Classroom. (Penrod) or in Cinema-(to)-Graphy: Film and Writing in Contemporary Composition Courses (Bishop). I have taught First-Year Composition from this perspective and agree with these authors and others that opening up students' conceptions of what constitutes a text to include popular cultural forms can be an engaging and effective way to approach teaching critical thinking and critical literacy. (Although it may be worth considering David Marc's contention that to read about television is to cancel out the advantages of both (135).) A number of first-year composition textbooks and readers -- Media Journal: Reading and Writing About Popular Culture (Harris and Rosen), Rhetoric Through Media (Thompson), and Common Culture (Petracca and Sorapure) are just three examples -- also now use a cultural studies approach to popular culture as their central focus, though the critical political stance of the books varies in intensity. Television may not have the academic acceptance in most English Departments that even film has gained as being recognized of capable of rising to levels of aesthetic excellence, but it is occasionally recognized as a cultural force worth studying and with unquestioned relevance to our students. Yet the study of it begins with the assumption that television is a potentially corrupting influence against which students need to be inoculated with critical thinking skills.

When James Berlin, one of the more prominent advocates for a cultural studies-style approach to composition, writes in his final book Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures about his vision for a new way of teaching writing and reading he says the goal is "to enable students to become active, critical agents of their experience rather than passive victims of cultural codes" (104). As Thomas Newkirk notes, students, in the view of some advocates of radical, cultural-studies pedagogy, "are pictured as morally and civically

deficient, though not through any real fault of their own. They are the products of a media culture that has inculcated values in them that perpetuate consumption and rationalize social inequalities" (90). Though Berlin would see the goal of composition to get students to question the dominant privileged culture, rather than to emulate it as Hill would have desired, it is not difficult to see the similarity in their views of popular culture as the enemy of critical thinking and writing and in its effect on naive and intellectually vulnerable incoming students. Both the critical pedagogy and the liberal humanist position see the media as imposing a relatively uniform set of dominant values; both see students as passive consumers of a flashy, superficial popular culture they are powerless to resist; both see the power of popular culture flowing from its naive emotional power that can only be resisted through detached, rational analysis; and both see the teacher as the necessary secular savior who can awaken students to their naiveté and false consciousness and lead them to a level of higher, critical reasoning through print literacy (Buckingham and Sefton-Green 129).

Time and again the influence of mass communication and popular culture on the approaches and goals of first year composition have been ignored except when then are "figured...as a disease, a pathology, an infection requiring rhetorical training to fortify students' immune systems" (Trimbur, "Whatever Happened"). This should not come as a surprise if we consider the sense of taste and social class that dominates higher education in general and composition in particular.

Taste and Mechanical Reproduction

Pierre Bourdieu notes that detachment from feeling, the ability to stand back and apprehend things based on their stylized form instead of their function, is one of the central ways in which class distinctions are made (7). A work of art must be detached from any potential practical uses or potential for affect in order to be properly appreciated as a work of art. In Alice Walker's famous example in "Everyday Use", the sister with

education and taste insists that the quilt to be properly appreciate must no longer be used on a bed to keep people warm, but must be displayed as an artifact to be contemplated and appreciated (Walker). What Bourdieu says about how the dominant class defines itself through its aesthetic appreciation of art, could as easily be applied to the way the academy defines itself through its appreciation of writing and literature: "Contemplation now has to include a degree of erudition which is liable to damage the illusion of immediate illumination that is an essential element of pure pleasure" (30). Such learned detachment and appreciation is all the more important as a means of distinction in a culture in which so many of the cultural artifacts and referents are mass produced and commodified.

As Walter Benjamin points out, the mass reproduction of cultural artifacts "detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition" (221). The work that can be mass reproduced is no longer representative of a single artist producing a distinctive artifact for a single person's contemplation. The training and expertise to create or receive and understand the work are no longer necessary when the multiple copies can be distributed rapidly and cheaply. Creation and distribution now become inseparable from commodification and marketing. Such mass reproduction also allows everyone who comes in contact with one of these copies to be able to assert an opinion, to lay claim to expertise (231). Mass reproduction and distribution also allows everyone the possibility of engaging in the same acts as the artist. Everyone can take a photograph or make a home video. With programs such as Funniest Home Videos, Who Wants to Be a Millionaire, and daytime talk shows that depend on audience participation and "average" people as their focus, now everyone can perform on television as well. This disrupts the distinction between the creator or the artist, and the public that receives the artist's work (232). Indeed, the pervasive influence of television itself makes it intellectually suspect. Academics who go on television are often viewed with suspicion inside the academy as cheapening or watering down their work for popular appeal. In fact one study in Europe indicated that two-thirds of the social scientists surveyed believed that appearing on

television would meet with disapproval from their colleagues (Gripsrud 42)[1] Thus a cultural force such as television, widely available and emphasizing affect and pleasure, cannot be accepted into the academy on those terms. It can only be studied with a detachment that denies or denigrates its emotional power and popular allure.

The values that many working-class and middle-class students bring to the academy, values that include an appreciation of popular television as a pleasurable and legitimate public discourse, are dismissed and derided by the academy at large. If, as Bourdieu says, "in matters of taste, more than anywhere else, all determination is by negation," (56) then one way in which the academy clearly attempts to assert its superior taste is in its rejection of television and that medium's reliance on narrative and emotion. The degree to which this sense of taste functions as a class marker in the academy can been seen in the controversy with which the introduction of popular cultural forms as texts into English department courses is greeted; such curricular changes challenge the upper- and middle-class investment in a university education as a mechanism for perpetuating distinctions of class and taste (Weed 24). Television, and other popular cultural forms from greeting cards to country music, mark the people who watch and enjoy it as sentimental and unaware of their complicity in the ideology of the dominant consumer culture (Clark 102). When art forms become available to the population at large through mass media, the elite must then make clear that sensuous pleasure no longer defines a work as artistic. Consequently, the academy must privilege a detached, aesthetic approach to art -- including writing -- that avoids the emotional and the sensuous.

In English studies the educated person continues to be the one who can discern through her taste and sensibility the quality of a literary work and then write about that quality in a detached and rational manner. This taste and sensibility, in turn, is still considered to be a marker of middle-and-upper class cultural status. Print literacy becomes then a union card for class status and upward mobility (Marc 29) In order to gain such status, the college student must pass through and acquire the literacy requirements of

English studies. This has traditionally taken place in literature courses, where the "real work" of an English department is still often considered to take place. Though there have been small and slow changes in recent years, rhetorical criticism and practice, overall, is still a sideshow to literary criticism and the latter's unspoken claim that it is the key to the cultural values of the middle and upper classes. Where courses in rhetoric were once taught to upper-level students, the role of teaching the production of texts, rather than their consumption was moved to the first-year, beginning with Harvard's course in 1885. There were a variety of reasons for such a move, but among them was the sense that incoming students required "an adult course of indoctrination into social and linguistic propriety" (Miller 89). As Miller points out, one goal of the first-year writing course was to take students who did not display the appropriate discursive sensibilities and skills and, by placing their writing under bourgeois gaze of the institution, "certify their propriety, and...socialize them into good academic manners" (66). In this way, composition served as a compulsory inoculation of academic culture that would bring students in line with the dominant tastes and ideology of the university.

Such an unspoken agenda of assimilation into class assumptions and taste of the university remain very much at the heart of what happens in a first-year composition class. As Lynn Bloom argues, given the status of first-year composition in many schools as the only course required of all incoming students, the often unspoken agenda of the course is to introduce and indoctrinate new students into the values privileged by the institution. Along with writing, they are introduced to "a vast subtext of related folkways, the whys and hows of good citizenship in their college world" (656). At the same time, the course is expected to help them overcome the cultural and discursive beliefs and habits that are unacceptable to the mainstream of the academy. As Bloom puts it, "Like swimmers passing through the chlorine footbath en route to plunging into the pool, students must first be disinfected in Freshman English" (656). Making certain that students understand

the primacy of print over image, of exposition and analysis over narrative, of rationality over emotion, and of just about anything over television is part of that unspoken agenda.

Writing is the unabashed hero and indispensable guide into the academic world of the intellect. Students need only pick up any text, be it a handbook, rhetoric, or anthology, to find out that writing is empowering, thoughtful, liberating, and will make them more complete people both intellectually and morally. For example, Donald Murray writes that, "Writing is the most disciplined form of thinking; writing is the fundamental tool of the intellectual life" (The Craft of Revision 9). Marjorie and Jon Ford tell students that "writing is a demanding and challenging activity...a valuable and meaningful experience when you feel that you are writing about something vital, something that changes your mind and feelings" (xxxiv). Even in a more instrumentalist textbook such as Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum, Laurence Behrens and Leonard J. Rosen write that, "because it involves such critical and widely applicable skills, your writing course may well turn out to be one of the most valuable -- and one of the most interesting -- of your academic career" (xxx). From A.S. Hill's Harvard course to the present, the teaching of composition in college seeks, in the words of the 1974 NCTE Commission on Composition, to "help students to expand and enlarge their worlds, to live more fully" (qtd in Miller 96).[2]

The unspoken agenda of the first-year composition course as a means of indoctrinating students into the taste and class values of the academy and inoculating them against the influences of popular culture is grounded in certain assumptions about what constitutes appropriate discourse. Broadly speaking, such courses are built on the study and production of discrete print texts by individual authors that contain some element of analysis or reflection. The student is to learn to produce writing that reflects individual critical thought, avoids unexamined emotion, and recognizes the necessity for evidence and proof to support claims, whether in traditional argument papers or in the details of a personal narrative.

Though the notion of the individual writer working to create a work of autonomous thought may be questioned in discussions of critical theory in the field of composition, such discussions have not substantially changed the concept of the author working with agency in most first-year composition courses. It is one of the uncomfortable paradoxes of much contemporary composition theory. On the one hand, many of us accept the postmodern idea that our identities are culturally constructed and unstable. On the other hand, though we may find such theorizing persuasive, we still want to see our students writing as stable, unified individuals with firm senses of authorial agency. There are a number of assumptions that have formed and continue to influence this view of the student writer, from the emphasis on the creative individual -- even in rhetoric -- resulting from Nineteenth Century romanticism (Connors 301-302) to the need for training professional managerial classes "whose capital resides in their ability to have opinions, make judgments, present views, and offer compelling accounts and explanations of their own and other people's experiences" (Trimbur, "Whatever Happened"). In these terms, writing is not only the gateway into the academy, but also the portal to upward mobility. Work in most first-year composition courses is expected to be completed by the student working on his own; he should produce work that exhibits his individual and original thought and effort. "We teach students that writing conveys power and authority. We teach them that it is the writer's responsibility to control the language and consequently its message and its effect on the audience, lest that authority be dissipated" (Bloom 659). Even courses that use collaborative strategies such as workshops eventually ask students to return in isolation to their writing to produce final revisions. The penalty for not doing individual work is plagiarism; a transgression usually described in the harshest terms in course syllabi and in textbooks.

The texts that the individual student is expected to consume and produce are expected to be discrete and able to stand on their own as pieces of writing. Even in classes where students are encouraged to look for intertextual influences or asked to incorporate

other texts into their writing, they are still often taught that the texts stand should be able to be read on their own. The writing assignments they encounter are designed to help them produce a series of discrete texts, usually non-fiction, most often as some form of that amorphous creature known as the "essay." Writing portfolios that are developed and evaluated more holistically are still usually comprised of papers that are discrete responses to individual assignments. If this is the case in first-year composition, it becomes even more so in literature and upper-level creative writing course. These pieces of writing are most often produced for consumption in the classroom, not in any larger public or cultural context. Similarly, the readings in composition anthologies are usually reproduced out of their original context, disconnected from their original rhetorical moment or intended audience. The essays, articles, and stories may be thematically grouped, but are still presented as discrete artifacts with individual introductions and study questions that are largely disconnected from the other readings in the anthology.

Where Emotion is Suspect and Pleasure is Denied

The writing that is produced in these courses is intended primarily not for affect or to create pleasure, but to engage in some form of abstraction, analysis, or reflection. Whether in a personal narrative, critical essay, research paper, or other form, the writing that is taught and privileged is expected to contain a moment (or moments) when the author steps back from the events or evidence described in the text to address concepts, theories, or ideas. In most textbooks and most scholarly books about pedagogy, one of the key elements of writing students should be taught is the ability to step back and analyze or reflect. Quite often this is supposed to happen in an atmosphere of calm and rational thought in which emotion or affective response has been put aside. Much of this conception of proper "academic" writing can be traced to the emergence during the past century of exposition and analysis as the dominant and privileged form of academic writing. Though narrative and argument continued to be taught in some courses, the

expository essay with its detached and rational explanation and analysis of evidence overshadowed them as the writing at the center of the first-year composition course (Connors 237-238). There were a number of trends in the academy that helped contribute to the increasing influence of the expository, analytical essay in composition. Among these trends were the pressures to train students to enter managerial professions where such analysis was privileged over argument or narrative. Also, as the social sciences and humanities tried to keep up with the rising prestige of the hard sciences within an increasingly positivist and technologically oriented academy and culture at large, they began to adopt more quantitative and positivist forms of knowledge generation and to communicate in the detached analytical forms of exposition. The classical rhetorician's consideration of pathos was brushed aside and forgotten. The emerging field of composition, seeking its own sense of legitimacy in the academy was not immune to such pressures. Even the dominance of New Critical techniques in the post-war university focused on close, analytical readings of texts and the avoidance of affective responses. Indeed, in the rationalist, positivist world of the academy, emotion of any kind continues largely to be regarded as suspect. Emotion, regarded as evidence of a popular, banal, and often feminine response (Clark 97) is something to be overcome in the quest for more mature and "higher-order" reasoning.

Consequently first-year writing students familiar with television's emphasis on emotion find themselves in an environment where emotion is suspect. If television programs often want us to identify with the people on the screen and if discussions about television programs are often about replaying the plot and sharing the emotions, discussions in the college classroom are supposed to be about the abstract ideas that books allow us to consider. How students feel about a text is not enough -- most teachers I know cringe when they hear students praising a piece of writing because they could "relate" to it. It is the engagement with the ideas represented in the text that matters.

Similarly, the emphasis in the college classroom is to connect those ideas to other abstract ideas in an intertextual and often interdisciplinary way.

The neo-Romantic[3] movement in composition in the early 1970s, exemplified in the work of Donald Murray, Ken Macrorie, Peter Elbow and others was, in part, a reaction against the emphasis on detached exposition and analysis. Narrative, personal experience, and emotion were once again permissible in student writing in the service of finding and communicating the truths of the writer's experience. It is important to note, however, that the goal of this approach was for the writer to discover, through writing, a true self and experience, and to communicate that through an honest and authentic writing voice. As Macrorie puts it, "All good writers speak in honest voices and tell the truth" (15). Yet there is an unstated assumption that though emotion was part of this writing process, it was to be emotion in moderation as illustrated in literature, not the cheap sentimentality of popular culture. The source of the honest voice and truth should be direct experience, not popular culture. Though there are not direct attacks against popular culture, the references made by a writer such as Murray are generally to the words and works of novelists and poets -- James Baldwin, Flannery O'Connor, William Faulkner, Thomas Williams (Learning by Teaching 86) -- not to elements of popular culture such as television or even film.

Of course these books are about the teaching of writing and it would be unfair to criticize them for seeing writers as appropriate models for students. My point, however, is that these references to professional writers, though stirring to me as a writer and teacher of writing, may be less meaningful to my students. What I regard as an obvious model and goal, they may regard with apathy or perhaps even antipathy if they, as many of the students I interviewed related, have been forced-marched though such literary works by overworked junior high and high school teachers using fill-in-the-blank worksheets and pop quizzes about symbolism and character structure. The neo-Romantic approach, indeed, was meant to rectify such an engagement with literature by putting the stress on

the student's writing. Yet literary fiction and poetry remained a model and goal in this pedagogy. The importance of direct experience as authentic subject matter along with the omission of popular culture in any form also indicates the unstated benefits of such an approach would be the writer's ability to transcend the superficial influences of popular culture In this stance there are echoes of A.S. Hill's demand that "A wise teacher of English will try to make his pupils put their real selves behind the pen and keep them there" (qtd in Paine 292) as essential to the resistance of popular culture. The other essential element in personal narrative writing as it was re-imagined by Murray and others in college composition courses remained the ability of the author to detach herself from the events and reflect on their more abstract meaning. Narrative by itself was not enough; the mature and accomplished writing would, as Thomas Newkirk notes, need "to negotiate convincing "turns" in the writing, shifts from rendering to reflection that point to the "significance" (a key word in personal essay assignments) of the experience being rendered" (12). Though the assignment may be different from the expository essay, the emphasis remains on the individual author creating a discrete text focused on reflection or analysis of events.

The arguments that rose up against the neo-Romantic writing pedagogy were often centered on the manner in which the approach seemed to confer validity on the use of emotion by student writers. Not only was emotion anti-intellectual and evidence of lower intellectual capabilities, but to portray writing as potentially pleasurable and even joyous was naive and not in keeping with the serious work that should be undertaken in college. Also, such personal narratives were attacked as encouraging a solipsism in students that did not sufficiently engage them in the necessary authorial detachment and analysis of events and evidence. As the use of "the personal" has re-emerged as a issue of debate in composition, and in some circles of literary criticism and the social sciences, the argument has continued to revolve around the dual dangers of emotion and the lack of objective detachment on the part of the writer.

I am much persuaded by Murray as I am by Berlin and others in some of their arguments. I agree that writing is a form of thinking that lends itself to reflection, consideration, subtlety, and depth. I see teaching writing as a way of engaging in critical thinking and analysis as a valuable goal in the teaching of composition and it is something I try to accomplish in my courses -- and even hope to get students to see the pleasures that can be found in reflection and analysis. It is important to realize, however, that those qualities most valued in composition courses of the individual writer producing discrete, analytical texts, are, as I will illustrate later in this chapter, not the same qualities that dominate the discourse on television.

Even in the books willing to include the study of television as a cultural form in the composition classroom, the discursive form employed in the investigation is the academic, analytical essay. It is what we give our students to read and what we ask them to write. Rarely, if ever, in any of these texts is there a discussion of the rhetorical forms of these popular culture texts in connection with what students will write or how they will write it. Instead there are what have become the conventional descriptions of a writing process that moves from prewriting to drafting to the revision of a conventional "academic" essay of media criticism. For example, in one description of a composition course, the instructor who uses electronic and print advertising as her primary texts for student inquiry and critique acknowledges that "what makes this class different from more traditional classes is not in the writing process itself, which has become common in the first-year composition classroom, but that the students must examine and critique their own experience, which often leads to resistance" (Burley 39). Most writing texts that use popular culture as primary texts are filled with critical essays about popular culture and brief descriptions of how to replicate such essays. These descriptions do not mention the rhetorical or discursive forms that the students are writing about in the context of *how* they are writing.[4] Consequently, though we may be willing to interrogate and investigate various

cultural forms as "texts", there remains a clear hierarchy distinguishing the texts that can be studied and the "texts" that should be emulated in academic discourse.

That such composition textbooks, and many composition teachers, make the implicit distinction between the popular culture texts to be studied and the analytical print texts to be produced by students reflects the divide Roland Barthes described between "readerly" texts and "writerly" texts. Barthes defines readerly texts as "products (and not productions)" (5) while writerly texts he defines not as things, but as "ourselves writing before the infinite play of the world" (5). Although Barthes is concerned with literature, it is not difficult to apply his definitions to television and composition in order to recognize one of the fundamental points of conflict. Television is a readerly text for most people. It presents material in the home that is consumed by the viewers and rarely if ever created by them. It is, for most viewers, product and not process. The point for most people watching a television program is not how it was created, but how they decode and interpret it. In the composition classroom, however, the writerly text is the primary emphasis. Particularly with the advent of the writing process movement, it is the act of writing, the process of creation of the text that is of primary importance, rather than the final product created by the act. Because of this conception of the text, it is easy to believe that such a readerly text of television does not influence the production of writerly texts in the composition except as a means of distraction. The distinction between the readerly and the writerly text offers a productive lens through which to consider the different purposes and goals of television and of composition and one that will be worth coming back to in later chapters. For now, however, it offers yet another way of understanding why composition textbooks that address the study of television and other popular culture texts pay so little attention to the effects television may have on the ways students read and write.

It is also important to point out that the textbooks noted above are the exceptions in the world of first-year composition. More often than not, popular culture and mass

communication are not addressed in composition textbooks and anthologies. First-year composition teachers often discuss, with each other and with students, the effect of high-school writing pedagogies on student writing; this influence is important and has been addressed often in composition writing and research. But the subject of television only arises, if at all, as an object of derision. The separation of speech from NCTE in 1914 left the former to eventually evolve into departments of Communication studies that included in their field mass media such as television. Composition, meanwhile, remained connected with English departments and kept its disciplinary eyes on print texts as the authoritative and most important forms of communication. Even English department courses with a cultural studies emphasis use it as an approach to print texts, with other texts used as supplements to illuminate the fiction, poetry, and essays. As John Trimbur notes, "it is fair to say that the vast majority of faculty working in composition see little reason to pay attention to the work in rhetoric or mass communication that occurs under the auspices of communication departments" ("Whatever Happened"). Indeed, it is not unusual to have Communication departments and English departments both offer similar courses in film studies or argument and persuasion. Yet the courses exist independently and are the extent of any overlap. Communication doesn't teach poetry and English rarely touches television.

Though critical theory and cultural studies have had an influence in the fields of English and Composition studies among tenured professors and graduate students, a consideration of course descriptions, publishers' textbook catalogues, conversations with writing teachers at various institutions, and even most scholarly journal articles would make it hard to argue that this influence has reached down to change the majority of first-year composition courses taught by underpaid adjuncts and teaching assistants working on their masters degrees in literature. If composition as a practice has moved beyond the current-traditional practices of thirty years ago, it remains in practice a course constructed on an instrumental, belletristic, traditional conception of "text" as the literary or academic essay. We can theorize all we want about the shifting nature what we conceive of as texts

and yet, should we walk into a room of first-year composition teachers and write the word "text" on the board and ask for a definition I am confident that the majority of responses would begin and end with the printed book or the essay. For the sake of this study, then, I have to work with these definitions of television and text as they exist on the ground, in the first-year composition course where there *is* a division between television and print for both students and teachers. It is precisely the political conflict and resistance to this cultural studies view of text and the conception of what is legitimate discourse in the world of first-year composition that I am addressing in this chapter. I will save for my concluding chapter the discussion of how the field of composition needs to face the way in which the conception of what constitutes a "text" has changed for our students and ourselves and ways in which we might begin to address those changes.

"Print" and "Television"

At this point I find it useful to pause and address how I am defining the two deceptively simple terms that dominate this project: print and television. Even in such an attempt at definition, precision and clarity are often elusive and words slip and slide out of our grasps. "Print" is as large and amorphous a term as "television." Though print could cover everything from newspapers to junk mail to poetry to graffiti to the words that appear on television advertisements, in this project my interest, though perhaps touching on broader conceptions of print, is primarily focused on "print" as it is both perceived and experienced in a first-year composition class. This includes the perceptions and experiences of students of what print in a composition and writing class should include in terms of what they read and what they should write. It also includes print as presented and evaluated by their teachers as well as print as discussed within the field of composition and rhetoric. The latter covers student writing, rhetorics and readers used as first-year composition textbooks, textbooks and academic writing in other fields, and the essayistic and academic prose that dominates the conversation in the field as the goal of college

writing instruction. Though I am well aware that there exist deep divisions as to whether the goal of teaching college writing should be, among other things, belletristic essays, traditional arguments, or critical "academic" literacy, I would argue that there is broad agreement within the field that the goal is not popular writing, technical writing, journalism, advertising, imaginative prose or poetry, and so on. These are seen as more specialized forms of discourse that should be more appropriately approached, if approached at all, in more specialized upper-level courses. Though this is a position that I believe is, for a variety of reasons, flawed and untenable, it is undoubtedly the position that dominates the theory, research, and teaching of writing at the college level. Consequently I am most interested in this project in the academic and literary forms that are currency in a first-year college writing classroom.

Television is both easy to identify and difficult to define. Stephen Heath notes that the speed with which it changes in technology and content, its unending flow, and its mundane and ubiquitous nature make television "a somewhat difficult object, unstable, all over the place, tending derisively to escape anything we can say about it" (267). Even so, I am attempting to keep my primary focus on television as the forms of discourse that we, and more specifically our students, encounter when the sets click on. I am interested in the forms of communication and the rhetorical forms that we encounter and decode when we watch and the ways in which those forms are constrained and constructed.

When considering television from this view of discourse, however, it is impossible and counter-productive to limit the discussion to the mere use of words. Television, as we obviously know, is a medium that blends spoken word, printed word, image, sound effects, and music. Though my focus may shift among these elements, and certainly there are some elements, such as television's power as moving images, that are more critical to my project than others, it is always impossible to isolate one element when thinking about how television is experienced as discourse. As a news reader sits at a desk, talking about a fatal airplane crash, we may see hovering in the background a drawing of a plane cracking

in two with the word "CRASH!" written across it in bold letters. There may then be a cut to film of the crash site, narrated by an on-scene reporter over sound of helicopter rotors and ambulance sirens, with printed words along the bottom identifying the reporter and the location of the crash. In order to think about how such a segment of television is watched and decoded -- and of the effect that might have on how the viewer experiences and is influenced by the discursive structure -- we have to try to maintain some awareness of the balance and blend among these words, sounds, and images and the rhetorical context in which they are developed and offered.

It is rarely simple to isolate form from content. Though my focus is not on content of individual programs, it is clear that content is always there influencing form. Certainly for our students, who have a sophisticated awareness of the nature of the dominant forms on television, the content matters. The content of television programs now forms the most pervasive and uniform social context in our culture. Our most significant cultural events, from impeachment hearings to the Super Bowl to the Gulf War to the final episode of Seinfeld, come to the great majority of the population through television. Our most widespread cultural referents come from the content of television programs. If you want to make an allusion to Shakespeare or the Bible, you need to stop and consider whether your audience will have the requisite indexical knowledge to understand the connection. On the other hand, if you want to make reference to The Brady Bunch, Mr. Roger's Neighborhood, or Ward and June Cleaver, you can be confident that, regardless of your audience, the majority will understand the allusion even if they have not seen the actual television programs. We can expect to share the definition of a sitcom, a soap opera, a music video, a cop show, or the evening news -- even as those forms shift and evolve -- though we have to go to great pains to try to explain to first-year composition students, and to ourselves, what we mean we when label a work an "essay". The programs and events we as a society see on television, then, provide our common cultural backdrop. It is television that, today, provides us with a sense of national culture as we watch common

events, such as the Challenger disaster or the O.J. Simpson trial, that allow us to situate ourselves as members of that nation, that culture (Sturken 26). This creates a community of sorts by transmitting a common body of experience that can be discussed with others the next day. We are never completely alone when we watch television because we understand that there is the probability that others, including our friends, neighbors, and co-workers, are watching the same program at the same moments as we are. As Joshua Meyrowitz has noted, television has become like the weather: No one takes responsibility for it, but everyone is aware of it and possesses it as a common experience and source of conversation (146).

For many of our students, and often for ourselves, only their lived experiences provide them with more information about the world than what they receive through television. It is necessary to consider then how this content influences our students' senses of themselves, the world around them, and their ideas of communication and writing

I am also studying television as including, but not being limited to discrete individual programs -- though not including video games or movies except as they are experienced as part of a broadcast or cable network's schedule. More than that, however, I am interested in the viewing and decoding habits that students use to make sense of the discourse. In other words, how does student understanding of genre, forms, authority, identity, emotion, and convention allow them to watch, understand, and make critical decisions about what they watch on television.

Though television programming is not something that simply magically arrives in our living rooms, it is created and produced by thousands of people, that creative process is not my focus in this project. It is important to remember that television programs and advertisements are created by people and to keep in mind the commercial forces that drive and shape the nature of those creative processes. My focus, however, is on how these programs are received and read by students; how they engage with television as a social practice. Because, for these students, the authorship of television programs is invisible and

something they have rarely considered, it will not be a primary concern of mine except as it relates to composition's emphasis on individual authorship and authorial presence -- an issue I will discuss more fully in Chapter Three.

Although this means I am paying less attention to television as a technology, I do realize that technology in forms such as the remote control and the advent of cable networks obviously influences how the discourse is constructed and how we perceive it. This is also an issue that I will address in Chapter Three. Technology is also a factor as the advent of electronic communication means that we have to reconsider the role of "delivery" in our thinking about rhetoric in ways that we have not since the primacy of print over orality was established in the academy. This is where, in Chapter Five, and in the work of those studying visual literacy and computers and composition begins to offer ways of rethinking the future of composition in ways that are simultaneously intriguing, invigorating, and disturbing.

The Story is the Thing

In order to understand what happens in the composition classroom in terms of television and print, what happens with students' perceptions of reading and writing and television, and what disjunctions that causes for students and how we might reconsider the ways in which we approach the two discourses, it is important to compare how operates television as a cultural form with the previous discussion of first-year composition operate as cultural forms. What social practices are enacted by students -- and teachers -- when they watch television and how do we compare those with those social practices and ideologies that underlie and are reinforced in the first-year composition classroom? This allows us to begin to map the points of contact between television and composition and to recognize where those points represent convergence and where they represent conflict.

It is easiest to begin with the points of comparison that are relatively obvious when examining television and composition through the lens of rhetorical criticism. As I noted

above, as academics and as critics those of us in composition are used to dealing with discrete, individual works whether by students or by professional writers and critics. We bring that approach to any thought we give to television. It is a position that is reinforced by television criticism in the popular media (though, as I will illustrate below, it is a position that has been effectively problematized by critics and theorists in media studies). It is also the way that viewers of television perceive what they are watching. In the same way that popular media critics address individual television shows in their reviews, when we talk to others about television we often talk in terms of those individual shows. "Did you see "ER" last night?" we ask each other. Certainly the consideration of television as a collection of discrete programs is how I saw this project at the beginning. Because that is how we often think of television, it is also the way in which we often try to provide an explicit structure for what we are viewing. Friends is a sitcom, ER is a drama, 60 Minutes is a news magazine and we can expect each in turn to conform to certain conventions of that genre. This has important implications I will address in more detail in later chapters about how television viewers, including our students, think about concepts such as genre and structure. First, however, given that is the way we often think of television, it is useful to consider briefly what rhetorical forms permeate television when examined as individual programs before moving on to a more thorough investigation in the next chapter about what happens when these forms come into contact with the forms privileged in a writing classroom.

Though there are forms of television, such as the music video, that can be primarily collections of associative images, most television is structured around narrative. As Neil Postman correctly points out, exposition is not the dominant form of discourse in television. From sitcoms to dramas to news programs to cooking shows to daytime talk shows to music videos to documentaries, television privileges "storytelling, conducted through dynamic images and supported by music. This is as characteristic of Star Trek as it is of Cosmos, of Diffrent Strokes as of Sesame Street, of commercials as of Nova"

(148). Though there are other forms of communication on television, most notably the panel debate and the interview, the majority of programs -- and certainly the majority of programs young people watch -- are structured as narratives. Even panel debates are often structured so that they begin with initial questions about issues of the day and end with predictions about the week to come. Sarah Kozloff contends that "narratives are not only the dominant type of text on television, but narrative structure is, to a large extent, the portal or grid through which even nonnarrative television must pass" (69) Two illustrations of this are the way television presents sporting events and talk shows. Several networks, for example, provide pre-game commentary to establish the characters to be playing that day, and then graphics and commentary that explicitly describe the "story" of the game. And the popular daytime talk shows -- from Oprah to Jerry Springer -- are often loosely structured narratives with initial character exposition, ensuing conflict, emotional climax, and a denouement provided by the host's closing commentary. Certainly the programs students mention as being favorites are usually ones that favor narrative. As Kozloff points out, television, from fictional programs to the news, frequently imitates the most traditional forms and situations of storytelling. Like Walter Ong's discussion of "secondary orality," she notes that the evening news, for example, is reminiscent of "the original model of the prototypical narrative exchange -- the oral storyteller and the physically contiguous listener" (81). At the same time, the other people speaking on news reports, the soundbites of public officials, athletes, and people on the street -- people who may be thousands of miles from each other -- are edited and juxtaposed in such a way that they seem to engage in a coherent, organized dialogue of opposing views in a common virtual space (Wark 13).

If the oral and theatrical nature of much that is on television often privileges plot and story, and plot requires resolution, television programs offer conflicting concepts of resolution. On the one hand, we have the expectation that many programs will find some level of resolution before time runs out and the next program begins. If the detectives

seem to be stumped at ten minutes to the hour we find ourselves wondering "How are they going to figure this out in the next ten minutes?" and beginning to worry that this might be only the first of a two-part episode. We also expect some forms to provide more resolution than others. Sitcoms, for example, are usually expected to offer resolution by the end of thirty minutes of the program. Certain dramas are expected to be self-contained as are sporting events. The need for resolution happens subtly on television as well, in the television news correspondent's summarizing comment at the end of a report or the cute, human-interest story that signals the end and resolution of the entire newscast. That what Seymour Chatman calls "narratives of resolution" dominate the forms produced for television is significant when compared with the "narratives of revelation" that are valued and taught in literature and composition courses (48). The conflict students feel between these different forms of narrative is an issue I will discuss in Chapter Four.

The paradox of series television, however, is that the serial form often works against a larger sense of resolution even as it works to resolve the plot of individual episodes. The most extreme example of this, of course, is the soap opera. Even as individual plot lines may be resolved, though sometimes they are not, a larger sense of resolution, of a point toward which the plot is directed, does not exist for soap operas. They are one form on television that does not privilege plot but instead emphasizes relations among the characters (Rapping 183). A hybrid form of prime time drama emerged in the 1980s with programs such as Hill Street Blues that contained story lines of varying lengths. Some plot lines would be resolved within a particular episode, some would continue for several episodes, and some would be continued over a season or longer. This approach is now common among a number of prime time dramas such as ER or NYPD Blue. Other shows such as The X-Files explicitly offer two kinds of episodes: ones with self-contained plots that are resolved (in their own ambiguous way) within the episode and others that are installments in a longer story line that has been evolving since the series began.

For all series television, however, its nature allows resolution within an episode but not within the series. Whatever happens on an individual episode, the organizing problematic of the series must be allowed to continue the next week. The Starship Enterprise must goes on and on and not return from its voyage as long as Star Trek is on the air, in the same way that MASH required that the Korean War continue for eleven years. Unlike most popular movies or most novels, television programs do not build scenes toward a climactically and free-standing thematic whole (Saenz 580) that answers all our questions. Consequently, John Ellis says, resolution on television series "takes place at a less fundamental level, at a level of the particular in incidents...that are offered each week" (qtd in Saenz 580). This creates a narrative form that denies any sense of final closure and is marked instead by a weekly, relatively predictable, reconfiguring of events and characters. Unlike the film, play, or novel, then, there is no critical place to stand and look back at the entirety of the text, the move that is so often expected in composition and literature courses. Instead we are always somehow inside its structure rather than outside contemplating it as a whole (Allen 109). Most television series end when ratings fade and they are taken off the air without any attempt at a larger sense of resolution. Often these series move to syndication where they are watched out of any kind of sequence and it is impossible for the viewer to know where in the series a particular program fit (Is this from the first season of Murder She Wrote or the last?) When programs have the opportunity to conclude, such as The Fugitive, or MASH, or Star Trek: The Next Generation, or Cheers, rather than simply stopping, they are noted as being unusual, heavily publicized, and expanded from their usual time slots. Even then true resolution is often denied as characters from the original programs "spin off" into unresolved series of their own -- AfterMASH, Star Trek: Deep Space Nine, and Frazier -- that continue to feature occasional appearances by members of the original program's cast.

Because so many television programs operate as series, the awareness of them on the part of viewers grows as a shared set of events among familiar characters rather than a

traditionally contained narrative film or play or novel. Actions and even catch-phrases get repeated in almost ritualistic ways, almost like a Homeric epic, from week to week in a way that is familiar and comforting. As viewers we get to "know" characters, not because they grow or change, but for precisely the opposite reason. We see them, week in and week out, doing the same things in the same places with the same words spoken. Like the elements of our lived experience, the furniture in our house, our daily commute, the friends and family we see every day, it is familiar, comforting, and even more predictable.

Predictability and an unambiguous linearity are essential for most television. Television viewing is, in general, not a recursive activity. Even as we have VCRs and can tape programs, most people do so only to watch the program once. Consequently, television programs require that the overall narrative be direct, unambiguous, and powerful to maintain an audience member's interest and be understood in a single viewing -- a single viewing that is often distracted, an important idea I will discuss in a moment. This need for a clear and at least somewhat resolvable narrative is necessary so that people do remain engaged in the story -- and more important, that they remain tuned in for the commercials -- and don't reach for their remote controls. The need to keep viewers hooked on a program so that they are also tuned in for the advertisements requires that the information in the narratives be unambiguous and direct. As Albert Borgmann maintains that, "We have become impatient with difficulty and depth of meaning and therefore have insisted that complexity and ambiguity be reduced and hardened into unequivocal measures and magnitudes" (15). We desire recognizable actions and measurable facts that can be quickly processed and understood. So sitcoms and dramas rely on character types with repeated and recognizable catch phrases and gestures (and even theme music at times) and news and information programs rely on opinion polls and sound bites. Even conflict on the news is quickly broken down into understood opposing positions that can be characterized in a few words and labels. Ambiguity, multiple positions, shifting alliances, are incompatible with the nature of the narrative structure because they cannot

be quickly understood or satisfyingly resolved. Once through and you get it. Television must be understood quickly and clearly. Consequently, as John Leonard points out, it "softens, rounds, flattens, inflates, and approximates. From such a stereo, we get mostly types" (186). This further emphasizes the common construction of television as purely a medium of "entertainment." Though there are news programs and documentaries, a common response from students about the primary purpose of television was entertainment, not information or education on any level.

The final quality of the individual television program that it is necessary to consider briefly is how its creators rely on emotion. In rhetorical terms, pathos dominates television shows. Dramas are meant to tug at the heartstrings, sitcoms to amuse, advertisements to provoke anxiety or desire. Even news programs are often constructed to arouse anger (at government or business scandals), anxiety (about crime), pity (about disasters), or amusement at human-interest stories. Just as narrative is privileged over exposition, pathos is privileged over logos. Because the central concern in television broadcasting is for the size of the audience, rather than for winning a debate or inquiring into a question, the pathetic appeal reigns on television while the well-constructed, deliberate, logical argument is rarely experienced in any form. Television programs are less likely to reflect a particular idea point of view or position as they are to reflect an emotion or attitude. When considering the uses of emotion on television it is useful to remember that the underlying purpose of most television programs is to keep potentially distracted viewers tuned in long enough to watch the commercials the sponsors have paid the channels to show. Emotion is the backbone of advertising, playing on our desires and insecurities. Increasingly in television advertising the pitch often has little to do with the supposed merits of the product, and more to do with promoting an attitude with which it wants the audience to identify. Advertisements for Nike and Levis are but two prominent examples of such an approach. Programmers have to keep viewers interested in the brief segments of programming that go in between the commercials. Emotion is a quickly understood and

powerful way of doing this. For example, if I am zapping among channels with my remote control and I come across a scene of a man holding a hostage, gun pointed at the hostage's head, I can quickly and easily understand and become immersed in the emotional content of the scene. I might even stick around long enough for the commercial. Conversely, if I zap onto C-Span to a carefully constructed speech by scholar or politician, it will take me longer, and take more thought, for me to pick up the thread of the logically composed argument. The uses of emotion are important for television programmers because of the understanding that television is a medium of distraction and that viewers are now, often as not, equipped with remote controls. Immediate impact is vital to keep viewers tuned in for the ads. The implications of emotion in television are much greater than this simple observation and transcend individual programs and I will return to emotion and affect later in this chapter.

Responding to the Popular

It is important to keep in mind the ways in which television texts are dominated by narrative, resolution, and emotion, particularly when we consider the rhetorical skills students learn from their deep experiences with such texts, as I will discuss in Chapter Two. Just as important, though perhaps not as easy to recognize, are the essential ways in which television and composition as cultural forms are different. These are differences in form, purpose, and the uses to which television programs and composition courses are expected to be put by students, and by teachers. These more fundamental differences make simple comparative work, such as comparing logic and emotion, more difficult if often not impossible. These differences also help us understand some of the conflicts students experience when coming into a first-year composition course after having watched years of television as resulting from radically different experiences with media and discourse rather than merely as student apathy or cognitive impairment. If we can begin to understand these underlying conflicts, and make them more visible to our students as well

as ourselves, we can make it clearer about where the goals and forms of discourse we want students to enact in a writing course are different from the ones they have enacted while watching television. I believe that such an approach can help to address what often seems to be an unreasonable and unfocused student resistance to first-year composition courses but is instead an anxiety and even confusion at encountering a form of discourse with which they are unfamiliar and which withstands their attempts to compare it with the discourses with which they are most familiar such as television.

As I noted earlier in the chapter the field of composition has dual roots in rhetoric and literature. The study of both rhetoric and literature rise from a history of humanist philosophy that regards the reading and writing of the best print texts as activities that will empower the individual and improve the quality of that individual's life. Whether the focus of a composition course is to help students write personal narratives that allow them to express ideas and emotions, or to use a cultural studies perspective to critique popular culture texts, or to learn theories of argumentation that may help with writing assignments in other college courses, there is a fundamental philosophical purpose of composition courses and of the field in general: to help students make their lives better through learning to write and read more effectively. And we judge, and argue about, competing theories of composition and pedagogy with that philosophical assumption as the common ground on which we in the field stand.

Television, on the other hand, has its roots in popular entertainment, and even more fundamentally has its roots in commerce. There is no underlying assumption that television will act as a humanizing force for the individual viewer. The assumption instead is that television will provide the viewer with diversion and access to advertising. If television programming is illuminating in some way, if it produces works of aesthetic or intellectual value by happy accident, that is fine, but only as long as enough people keep watching it to make the sponsors consider it worth advertising on. As David Marc notes, an innovative television program will be evaluated by television programmers and

executives not by "the quality or lack of quality of this invention, or its beauty or truth or lack of same, but rather...how deeply it can penetrate the market without causing disruption of the marketplace" (56) Television, both programming and advertising, is judged by its popularity, by the number of eyeballs that stay glued to the screen, not by an underlying philosophical assumption about the value of what those eyeballs are watching. Television is indifferent to questions of quality and philosophy. Of course print texts in the academy may be products of commercial forces. Certainly writers such as Dickens famously cranked out chapters to fill pages between ads and get a paycheck, but they are presented within classroom walls as having a philosophical value transcending this commercial impulse. Such texts are not just diversions but are intended to offer intellectual or artistic insights. But it is the indifference of television to such insights or the philosophy they represent, that response only to the popular, that results in some of the most fundamental and striking distinctions between the way students experience television and the composition class as social practices. I will briefly outline a few of these distinctions that explain how different television is as a medium and discourse from the print medium we teach in writing classes.

Though our daily conversations about television and the way it is discussed in the popular media, may revolve around individual programs experienced as discrete texts, numerous media theorists, starting with Raymond Williams, have pointed out that attempting to apply a traditional model of what is considered "reading" to the way people experience television may not always be accurate. Television is just as often not experienced as discrete programs watched closely with undivided attention. In this way, television as a social practice makes an even more substantial departure from the way that composition and literature courses approach print texts.

It was Williams who noted in his 1974 book Television: Technology and Cultural Form that the central experience of television was not the individual program, but was instead an experience of "flow." For Williams, flow describes the multiplicity of programs,

advertisements, and other assorted images and messages that a viewer would experience during a given stretch of viewing time. Although there are television viewers who turn the set on for one program, and then turn it off when that program is over, just as often the television set get switched on and left on through a number of different programs. Even the individual program is interrupted every few minutes by commercials. Instead of the modern view of the discrete text, formed by the artist and apprehended by the reader as a discrete text, television texts are fragmented and disrupted and held together only by the flow of programming. Flow means that a viewer's experience and subsequent memory of an individual unit of television, such as an advertisement or news story or segment of a drama, is affected by the units that precede it as well as the ones that follow.

The attempt to break individual units out of the flow of television and write about them in the same ways we write about print texts -- the way television is usually written about in the essays that fill cultural studies composition readers, by the way -- is understandable, according to Williams, because it allows us to use a critical stance and language we find comfortable and familiar and to present an image of ourselves as "discriminating and experienced and (who) don't just sit there hour after hour goggling at the box" (89). As he points out, however, many of us do spend hour after hour in just such a manner and, even if we watch a short program, if it is on commercial television the narrative will usually be fragmented and segmented. It is not the same experience as watching a film or play, which are accepted in the academy as akin to the modern novel or poem as discrete texts, but is punctuated with advertisements and station breaks. Programming for commercial television is created with such fragmentation in mind and works with such interruptions incorporated into the rhythm of the narrative. (Such a rhythm seems inevitable and comfortable when viewed in the context of flow; it seems jarring and artificial if seen straight through without advertising, such as American programs on the BBC or programs released onto commercial home videos.) Network planners plan flow as a way of getting our attention and keeping us in our seats and

watching their programs -- and by extension watching the advertising that their programs are created to sell. As a compressed example of this, E. Ann Kaplan points to the way that MTV (when it actually shows music videos) arranges videos and promotional announcements for upcoming videos in order keep us watching in hopes that the next video will satisfy our desires (269). Of course on MTV the desire that videos, which exist as extended commercials for recordings, satisfy is the desire to buy the product being advertised. We are all familiar with the way that networks try to create programming themes for certain evenings (such as the "TGIF" lineup of programs that a number of students in interviews referred to by that label without naming specific programs) or schedule a new program between two successful programs in hopes of building an audience for the new program as part of the flow.

Although television is segmented into often unrelated items, it is important to remind ourselves that we do not usually experience it as fragmented, but instead perceive it as unified and coherent. As viewers we are able to understand the various levels of discourse even as they require distinctive decodings of meaning and emotion. "The transition from one register to another is made automatically with practice, but it is felt, and invites continual reconsideration of the relations between narratives, rhetoric, and authority" (Saenz 577). It is as if the heteroglossic world Bakhtin theorized for the novel has been blended with images and speeded up so that each novel lasts only a few minutes.

Margaret Morse notes that contrasting moods on a news broadcast, for example, can be tied together through discourse so that the trivial and traumatic can coexist within the same program (114). As with the earlier example of the news reader sitting at the desk with the image of an airplane and the word "crash" floating behind him, the news reader provides a discursive passage through the disconnected reports and the temporal constraints of the news program as a whole provide a structure within which to understand the purpose and limits of the program. In other words, the news may consist of

disconnected narratives or the narrative of a sitcom may be fragmented by advertisements, but we know that after the ads the sitcom will continue until half past the hour.

Very often on television, then, we look to the temporal constraints of a program to give it structure before we consider the structure of the narrative itself. These temporal expectations are what lead us to watch the clock as we watch the program and note the progress of the narrative in relation to the time left within the program to provide a satisfying resolution. Such temporal structures and the expectations they create for us as viewers are quite different from the spatial structures used to contain print. Print is measured in space, in pages, column inches, or even computer screens. The temporal experience of any act of reading is open-ended, with resolution (if there is one) reached not at a particular time, but in a particular place. As I will illustrate in Chapter Three, a discomfort with this indefinable sense of time connected with reading or writing came up frequently in conversations with students.

What is also important about the concept of flow for this project is the diversity and rapidity with which not only content but discursive and rhetorical features change within the flow of watching television. News is punctuated by narrative ads. Narrative drama is interrupted by direct-address ads. Programming moves from comedy to drama to news to a talk show over the course of one evening even if the viewer never changes the channel. "Final evaluation of any given segment is delayed, attenuated, cut off, or redirected" (Saenz 577). Obviously the advent of the remote control, and of more cable channels, further complicates the discursive experience of watching television. Now a viewer can watch ten minutes of movie then zap to two minutes of a music video then zap to ten seconds of an ad, then zap to three minutes of a sitcom, then zap to twenty minutes of drama before zapping to five minutes of a baseball game just to get the score. This is not to say that these segments are all experienced as isolated units. They do take on meaning in relationship either to each other or to previously viewed segments and the implications for the ways in which students use remote control units to control their

reading of television is also an issue I will address in Chapter Three. Yet the nature of this experience with zapping is quite different than the coherence of form and organization taught to students and valued in their writing. In writing courses students continue to read, and are asked to produce, texts that reflect the modern idea of a unified authorial presence creating a discrete text. The associative reading of television flow, however, means that narrative continuity often becomes secondary to the limited continuity provided by the repetition of scenes, images, or ideas or the longer term continuity of television's self-referential nature.

It is also worth noting within the flow of watching television that a viewer will not only encounter different discursive and rhetorical approaches, but will find them often in the service of opposing ideas or at least opposing treatments of similar ideas (Newcomb and Hirsch, 509). It becomes clear that the experience of "watching television", in terms of form and content, cannot be contained in such a seemingly homogenous description, something that students understand quite well as I will illustrate in the next chapter. Experiencing even a small part of the flow of television programming offers little that is homogenous and unified in comparison with an extended piece of reading such as a novel or essay. The only traditional reading act that could come close to it would be reading a newspaper page one column at a time, regardless of the insertions of advertising or the shift between stories. Even that would not capture the speed, variety of content and rhetorical form, and temporal constraints of watching television.

Irony in a Medium of Distraction

It is also difficult to look only at individual television programs as discrete texts because of the medium's self-referential nature and its seeming detachment from any outside sense of time. Understanding an individual program or advertisement is much more difficult without taking into account the intertextuality of television programs (not to mention the intertextuality that transcends the medium that I will address later in the

chapter). Any moment of viewing is always conditioned by other television texts (Allen 132). Not only has much of television become self-referential toward its own forms and conventions -- sitcoms that spin-off from other sitcoms, characters that cross from one program to another, characters in one show that comment on watching another, and so on -- but the programming itself often now consists of programs about television. Two examples of this would be the programs that consist of popular television advertisements or "blooper" shows of the mistakes that have been edited from programs. At the same time, these programs, and everything else on television, exist in a timeless world where programs are broadcast and re-broadcast so that the idea of television's past and its present are often indistinguishable. New episodes of shows, such as The Simpsons or Frazier or Beverly Hills 90210 often run the same evening as syndicated re-runs of the same shows from years past. Other programs such as I Love Lucy continue to be broadcast almost four decades after new shows had been produced and after all the principal actors have died. "In TV deep space, all those decades co-existed simultaneously, jabbering at one another in a warp of white noise" (Leonard 71-72). This means that television does more than exemplify what Umberto Eco has termed the ironic articulation of the "already said" -- in which every communication is made in ambivalent relationship to its antecedent communications -- it operates in terms of the "still being said" (Collins 334).

Yet this sense of "still being said" is never presented without a sense of the history of the medium in which it exists. Re-runs of The Waltons or Bonanza on The Family Channel (formerly the Christian Broadcasting Network) are presented as exemplars of the traditional, family values of the earlier, more wholesome era of American society (those wonderfully tranquil times of the Sixties and Seventies), while re-runs of The Donna Reed Show and Bewitched on Nickelodeon are presented as "fun for the contemporary family, 'camped up' with parodic voice overs, super-graphics, and reediting designed to deride their quaint vision of American family life, which we all know never really existed even

'back then'" (334). Such an overtly ironic, self-reflexive form contrasts with many of the essays assigned as both reading and writing in first-year composition that focus on the connection with "real" experiences or evidence. The writing and reading of print texts in writing classes is almost always expected to make connections beyond the individual text, not to be enclosed and conscious only of its own history in the way of television.

This self-referentiality results in a medium hyperaware of its cultural status, function, and history. It can then be best experienced by those who are deeply enough immersed in it to understand the intertextual references. This, for example, explains the appeal of having characters from one television show make an appearance on another -- such as a character from Law and Order who shows up in the police station of Homicide and then a character from Homicide shows up on Mad About You. Viewers must also share in this deep knowledge of the medium to understand as it participates in its own parody. Some programs, such as Saturday Night Live, Seinfeld, SCTV, and The Simpsons mock not only the conventions of television programs and viewers, but mock themselves as television programs. For example, on an episode of Seinfeld a character named Jerry Seinfeld was hired by a network called NBC to write a sitcom about his life as a comedian which he told the network executives would be a "show about nothing"; this was, in fact, the same pitch he and co-creator Larry David used to sell the "real" sitcom (Andersen 256), In the same way, on an episode of The Simpsons Homer and Bart watch a Thanksgiving Day parade criticizing the new balloons that are based on a trendy new television series just as they watch a Bart Simpson balloon go by on their cartoon television set. Some critics maintain that this increasingly overt self-reflexivity is evidence of television's growing artistic and intellectual sophistication (Andersen 259) .

The tendency for ironic self-referentiality also makes it more difficult to conduct an effective exterior critique of television. If we all already understand that television is a diverting, mindless, and mediocre waste of time, then there is no power in saying so again. The initial episode of an animated sitcom, The Family Man, focused on the poor quality of

much that is broadcast on television and how watching it had destroyed the imagination and cohesiveness of the family in the program. The family is thrown into crisis when the local cable station loses its signal. As the plot of the show unfolds the characters talk openly of the conventions of sitcoms that will allow for the necessary plot twists and character conversions at just the right time. (The "heartwarming" resolution of the program was that, from now on, the characters would watch television "as a family.") Of course the joke was on us because we were watching a mindless sitcom critique mindless sitcoms; except that we knew that the sitcoms were mindless to begin with so we could be both the subject and object of the ridicule and laughter. The critique has already been done and discounted because everyone knows better than to take television seriously anyway. Consider the ABC promotional campaign of the late 1990s consisting of questions such as "Without it, how would you know where to put your couch?" or "If TV is so bad for you, why is there one in every hospital room?" As Bill McKibben says about television, "You can hardly deconstruct it -- it's deconstructing itself. There's nothing on TV to push against; even if you're inclined to push, after a while you stop and are carried along for the ride. On a medium that mocks itself, seriousness does not play" (241). As I will discuss in later chapters, many of our students are well-studied and quite adept at the quick and cutting ironic comment or attitude. They are not fooled by television and can move in a flash to irony. The question to ask then is what are the implications of this ironic sensibility for how we teach writing and can we, as teachers, make any use of it to get to some of the qualities we privilege in writing and reading?

It becomes surprisingly easy when writing about television to do as I have done and talk about what happens when the "viewer watches television." In other words, by reading the text of television I begin to assume the effect that such a text has on members of the audience. Yet there is a gap between encoding and decoding that is particularly important when considering the way television is received by viewers. Though we all may talk about "watching" television, in fact such a term is an ill-defined shorthand for a varied

and varying set of social practices (Morley 197). In some surveys, in fact, as many as fifty to sixty-four percent of the viewers reported engaging in some other activity, including preparing a meal, talking, reading, while watching television (176) Another study indicated that middle school children spent a third of the time they were "watching" television also engaged in other activities (Neuman 52) This means that we need to understand what Lawrence Grossberg calls the "significant difference between watching a particular program (which we all do sometimes) and watching TV (which we all do most of the time). That is to say, the specifics of the episode are often less important than the fact of the TV's being on" (130).

Consequently, considering the social context in which television is watched becomes vital to considering its effects. For example, though television seems ubiquitous in our culture, in fact most of our television watching happens in a domestic space in which other activities are going on. This makes it significantly different than watching a play or a movie in a theatre or discussing an essay in a composition course. (One student remarked during a television watching session for this project that took place in a library multi-media classroom, that it would be more authentic if I had a refrigerator out in the hall he could go raid during commercials. I agreed.) Though our readings of all texts, print and electronic, require some intertextual connections, our experiences with television are particularly interrupted and shaped by the social contexts of our readings. When we think about how television is "read," then, we must think about how the reading is shaped through this "distracted glance" at the text.

Such a distracted interaction with television means that the viewer maintains a dual state of mind while "watching." According to Margaret Morse it "depends on an incomplete process of spatial and temporal separation and interiorization" (110). Like the shopping mall and the interstate highway, Morse says, our connection with the "outside" through television drifts between the real outside and an idealized representation (110). This dualism creates a non-space of televised "elsewheres" and "elsewhens" that are both

everywhere and nowhere in particular. For television it depends on a system in which we are addressed directly; unlike film, television acknowledges that it is being watched, yet does not necessitate direct face-to-face contact with others (107).

> The implication is that television epitomizes a new ontology of the everyday: vast realms of the somewhat-less-than-real to which significant amounts of free time (unpaid leisure, the shadow of work) are devoted on a routine, cyclical basis. The features of this derealized or nonspace are shared by the freeway, mall, and television alike (103).

At that same time that television connects us with a larger world, it keeps that larger world behind glass, at a safe and alluring remove. We can attend to it when it interests us, like the landscape that we speed by on the interstate, and turn away from it when we find it boring or unpleasant or when something in our immediate experience, such as a conversation with a real person in the car or the room, demands our attention. Again, this is quite different from the kind of attention and concentration we expect to be given to class discussions and to the reading and writing of print texts. Yet even when we turn away from the television or the landscape, we continue to pay a low level of attention to what is happening on the other side of the glass. If the landscape changes or the music on the television program swells or the "live studio audience" explodes with laughter, we remain engaged enough to turn back to the program. When we do notice the world brought to us on the nonspace of the television screen we can do so without necessarily having to get more involved with what is happening because there is no real consequence for us as the viewers from the events on the screen.

Television's presence as a medium of distraction again reinforces the way in which it exists in terms of popular response rather than on a foundation of humanist philosophy. Here Morse's comparison between the mall and television is particularly appropriate. The experience of watching television is often like the experience of wandering through the mall with no particular errand in mind. You can wander up and down the walkways of the mall, distracted and diverted by the shop windows and people who are shopping,

occasionally even stopping into a store to look at something more closely. The environment is enclosed and completely devoted to selling you goods. But you will still able to carry on a conversation with a friend; nothing around you will require your complete attention or ask that you remember it, use it in another context, or connect it with another experience. Your history and your plans are, momentarily, unimportant. All that matters is the experience of the present you are having while wandering in the mall. You don't stop to analyze or reflect on the experience of gazing at each store (unless perhaps you're an academic) but instead you wander in the present, enjoying the distracted moment. The analogy to having the television on and watching, zapping through channels, and talking with a friend is clear. Neither activity requires a purpose or an underlying philosophical goal. The analogous situation for the composition course would require you to plan your visit to the mall with a specific goal in mind -- say the purchase of a new pair of shoes -- that would improve your life, a plan for achieving that goal, and a map that would show you where the shoe stores are located. You would have a purpose and goal and a way of connecting that goal to your life outside of the mall.[5]

The other way in which the shopping mall and television are analogous is in the way both attempt to simulate other realities. The mall uses storefront facades and plants and fountains to simulate an outdoor plaza or Main Street. Television, through its virtual window on the rest of the world, "brings" that world to use in the comfort of our living room. One of the characters in Don DeLillo's novel White Noise remarks, "For most people there are only two places in the world. Where they live and their TV set" (66). This virtual encounter with the rest of the world also has an effect on our students. For most of our students, the majority of the information they get outside of their face-to-face experiences, still comes through television. In fact, a 1999 Kaiser Family Foundation study found that children from ages eight to eighteen spent, on average, almost as much time watching television everyday as they did engaged with radio, video games, computer and Internet use, and listening to music combined (Kaiser). As a number of cultural studies

critics, notably Stuart Hall, have argued, globalization and the weakening of the nation/state as a cultural form results in a response that is simultaneously global and local (178). At the same time that there is a global mass culture that crosses national and linguistic frontiers with increasing ease and speed, there is an increasing emphasis on the personal and how that personal, and often marginalized or disempowered, voice is struggling to be heard. What is it, then, that translates this gap between our lived experiences and the global mass culture that is available to us with the click of a remote? Arjun Appadurai, says that it is the transnational "mediascapes" themselves that intersect with and help construct our personal lives and our sense of the lives outside of our lived experiences. He describes mediascapes as "image-centered, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality...what they offer to those who experience and transform them is a series of elements (such as characters, plots and textual forms) out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives, their own as well of those of others living in other places" (331). Yet these imagined lives of others living in other places remain detached from real, physical places. They exist only in the imaginary mediascapes that disseminate and contain the global public discourse.

Jean Baudrillard has famously theorized that the nature of the image has changed from being a "reflection of profound reality" to having "no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum" (6). Television, he maintains, is the ultimate form of this simulacrum in its unending bombardment of images that are no longer grounded in a recognizable reality. Though television often tries to work against this sense of hyperreality by describing television movies as "based on a true story" or, even more telling, a "dramatization of real events" such attempts actually only underscore the simulacra of the televised world. In an attempt to capitalize on real events by making television movies with actors who are cast because they look vaguely like the people we have seen on the television news (or was it the other way around?) and then altering events to fit the narrative needs of the medium and its audience, television succeeds in

creating what Baudrillard calls, "The hyperreality of communication and of meaning. More real than the real, that is how the real is abolished" (81). It is what allows some students to see the film "Titanic" six and seven times because the "real" love story of the fictional characters Jack and Rose overwhelms the "real" referent of the 1,500 people who died in the disaster. Even the film of the real wreck of the ship is used in the film, by the fictional characters, as a way of framing the romance. (It is this all-encompassing hyperreality in which the simulation becomes more real than any referent that allowed a writer of a recent letter to the editor in the Chicago Tribune to lambaste a movie critic there for his criticism of the film "Titanic" on its qualities as a film. According to the writer of the letter the critic lacked compassion for those victims who died in the real disaster (Biver).) Of course most people who watch television, if asked, could make clear distinctions between what is real and what is simulation. The point is that, on television, the distinction between the two no longer matters. The power of such a hyperreal discourse can be measured in the weight given to fictional characters in the public arena -- be it the 1992 "debate" on the definition of family between Dan Quayle and "Murphy Brown" or the Time magazine cover about the current state of feminism that represented its conception of the evolution of feminist thought through photos of Susan B. Anthony, Betty Freidan, Gloria Steinem, and "Ally McBeal."

The attempt to respond to this ascendance of image over reality, according to Baudrillard, is an even more robust effort to create reality in the "escalation of the true, of lived experience...(the) panic-stricken production of the real and of the referential" (7). Consequently it is no longer even enough to offer the television movies "based on real events" in which actors re-create reality. Instead television has moved on to "reality" programming such as Real TV with its home videos submitted by viewers of any variety of tragedies from firefighter injuries to small-plane crashes, or America's Funniest Home Videos in which home videos of various kinds of less lethal mishaps are played for slapstick comedy. The result of these broadcasts, however, is not to provide real referents

for the images on the screen, but to further intensify the sense that all of the representations are pure images without real referents. In this way viewers can watch programs such as World's Scariest Police Chases, in which "real" videos of high-speed car chases are shown, complete with collisions into other cars, people, and buildings (shown and re-shown in excruciating slow motion) and not be sickened by the sight of shattered and bleeding bodies because those bodies are not "real" anymore. It is no longer possible for the audience to comprehend the real referent of that image of a person hit by a speeding car. The blurring of the lines between the real and the simulation is not unknown by the students I talked with in this project and several talk about its effect in Chapter Three.

Once again we can see in television's indifference to distinguishing the real from the image the consequences of television's dependence on popular response. Lawrence Grossberg maintains television is indifferent to meaning, indifferent to the line between reality and fiction. It is not that the social has collapsed into simulacra, but that an ideological structure of what constitutes the "real," what creates the line between the private and the public has become less effective (141). Television need only be persuasive to itself, not to any particular viewpoint or position, not to reality or fantasy. It need only persuade the viewer to keep the set turned on and tuned in to the mass popular cultural voice. It need only be persuasive to itself as a vital part of the economic order and as vital force of cultural production (Heath 292). The writing that we want from students, however, we expect to have a clear and well-defined viewpoint, to be persuasive of a "real" and significant position. We often expect students to not only make the distinction between the real and the fictional -- although that is a position that is being challenged as the personal re-enters our conversations about writing -- but we expect them to find and build their writing on abstract ideas that are the result of critical thinking.

Although the lines between the real and the simulated are constantly permeable on television, that does not mean that the viewer is necessarily incapable of distinguishing

when the line is crossed. To assume that people watching television are necessarily duped into forgetting that the images on the screen are purposely produced somewhere else for a particular end would be to assume that most people think news readers are speaking directly to them as individuals. Perhaps rather than Baudrillard's concept of the simulacra, a more flexible metaphor for television is Morse's concept of a "membrane" whose "function is to link the symbolic and immaterial world on the monitor with an actual and material situation of reception" (18). In other words, when we watch television, we are susceptible to the images on the screen and to the consumer culture foundation on which those images are constructed. Yet, at the same time, we do learn things about the rest of the world and we do appropriate what we see on television for our own uses in our specific daily experiences. If we are to attempt to understand the ways in which our students have engaged with television, we have to think about the forms and genres of television as well as how television is experienced and decoded by students as viewers. We have to examine what our students' engagement is with what they see on television -- what they do or don't believe, what they do or don't invest with authority (as I will discuss in Chapter Four) and how and why they come to those judgments.

A final, but deeply influential element in those judgments, and a key experience of watching television is pleasure. Regardless of the ideological forces that construct a television program and shape our reception of it, we have to recognize that television, like much of popular culture, works also on an affective level. It gives us pleasure, and an emotional and embodied response. As all of the students I interviewed maintained, we watch television at least in part because it is enjoyable. Unfortunately, too few writing and literature courses get presented to students as having anything to do with pleasure. With the notable exception of neo-Romantic pedagogies, the idea of writing as being pleasurable rarely surfaces. Writing and literature courses may be important, develop critical thinking skills, deepen one's understanding of the human condition or of cultural forces, but they shy away from embracing affect or pleasure. Yet because television

privileges emotion as a rhetorical form, because we can experience it within our domestic spaces, because it is a form that favors intimacy and the "up close and personal" over the epic, and because it overtly does not take itself too seriously and therefore not demand rational critique, we are left open to experience the emotional highs and lows of television in a way that cannot be explained by the critique of ideology or of the simulacra.

There is often a contradiction, then, between the ideological appeals of television programs, the ways in which television works to reinscribe viewers into the dominant late-capitalist consumer culture, and the affective responses of viewers (Grossberg 142). It is what allows us to be brought to tears by the melodrama of show such as ER one moment and then move to ironic detachment about the advertisements that follow. Belief and cynicism, pleasure and irony sit comfortably side by side, or even simultaneously, on television. Even the distracted nature of much television watching allows us to pick and choose our level of emotional involvement with the programs we are watching. Unlike a movie in which the best we can do is hide our eyes, when we see something we don't like on television we can leave the room, turn back to the paper, or simply zap away. As Grossberg says, television, "offers in the apparatuses of its viewing, a strategic response to the contradiction between affect and ideology by placing the nomadic subject within an affective democracy" (143). In other words, the viewer negotiates the gap between affect and ideology by deciding which images to invest with meaning. This does not mean the viewer is impervious to ideology, only that there are affective, embodied responses to television that cannot be predicted by examining in isolation the program being broadcast. The appeal and anticipation of pleasure is central to the motivation for much television watching, as the students in this project will illustrate in the next chapter.

Resistance or Surrender?

Are we then destined to find ourselves positioned in front of the television as distracted consumers, unable to tell fact from fiction, powerless against the affective and

ideological forces presented to us on the screen? It is worth remembering that critics on both the right and the left, certainly including many of those using a cultural studies perspective, have bought into the idea of television viewers as cultural dupes (Morris 24). Certainly this is a prevalent construction of the power and influence of television when it is addressed by those in composition, as I discussed earlier. Again, however, it is useful to remind ourselves of the distinction between encoding and decoding, the difference between what television is and what it does. Though television is a public medium of immense proportions broadcast uniformly, it is received and read and used individually in the private, usually domestic, worlds of the viewers. John Fiske, Ien Ang and others have argued that this appropriation of television into the private worlds of viewers to create their own meanings allows for the possibility of the reinscription of the TV text and the resistance to its dominant ideology. We must therefore remain alert to the ways in which television watching allows both a "'vertical' dimension of power and ideology and the 'horizontal' dimension of television's insertion in and articulation with, the context and practices of everyday life" (Morley 276). As with reading, when we watch television we are not a uniform audience; our response is not monolithic. As John Leonard writes:

> To Jane Austen or The Nanny or Roseanne, you bring your own monocle and morbidity, whether you are Terry Rakolta, Peggy Charen, Rev. Donald Wildmon or an editor of Social Text; you cut or paste, underline or italicize, delete or dump a day's worth of brave deeds and shameful secrets (112).

We choose and use television for our individual purposes, investing with meaning or resisting with irony as fits our politics, social-class, gender, ethnicity, or mood of the moment. If we stay with the flow long enough, or keep zapping through the channels, we will find the television that appeals to us and that we can read, whether genuinely or ironically, as a text consistent with our ideological and cultural perceptions and needs. This ability to be read as different texts is part of what allows television to reach such a diverse audience. This is not to say that we are impervious to ideology, as Morse's metaphor of the membrane helps remind us, nor that as viewers we completely resist and

put to our own uses everything we see on the screen. Although viewers, including the students I interviewed and subjects in other studies (Liebes and Katz 218), have a tendency to claim that programs or advertisements have no direct influence on them, only on the other masses of dupes in society, in fact the ideology driving television takes us all along for some part of the ride, whether we are watching at any given moment or not. Most of all we need to be sensitive to the problems inherent in creating active/passive, dupe/resister dichotomies when thinking about how people watch and understand television. We all shift between these poles; or inhabit them simultaneously, within the blink of an eye.

Television and the first-year composition course are cultural forms that are enacted so differently as social practices that they cannot be expected to be easily compatible when they come into contact in our classrooms. Yet are television and composition, by privileging such disparate discursive forms, completely incompatible? It is naive to expect that students or their teachers are conveniently and thoroughly cleansed of the discursive influences of television as they pass through the classroom doors. If we want to understand what happens when these systems come into contact, we need to begin by listening to our students as they talk about their histories and perceptions of writing, reading, and television.

[1]Though, as Bourdieu notes in On Television, this disdain for other intellectuals appearing on television rarely stops an intellectual from accepting an invitation to be on television himself (60).

[2]Students, however, often take a more pragmatic and instrumentalist view toward their first-year composition courses saying they know they need to work on their writing because it will be something they can "use" in other courses.

[3]I believe "neo-Romantic" is a more accurate descriptor of the kinds of writing and pedagogies advocated by Murray, Macrorie, Elbow and others. The term "expressivism" was coined as a pejorative by those who sought to attack and marginalize this approach by

making it sound like a simplistic extension of Me-Generation pop-psychology.

[4]Thompson's Rhetoric Through Media, in a discussion of the conventions of an academic essay, includes a brief discussion of the conventions of television news to explore the idea of how conventions and rhetorical contexts shape our writing. He considers each form of discourse separately, however, and does not address the possibility that one might be influencing another (89-95).

[5]I thank John Erni for providing me with this useful and engaging metaphor.

CHAPTER II

A VALUABLE WASTELAND: WHAT STUDENTS KNOW ABOUT RHETORIC FROM WATCHING TELEVISION

When Julie[1] *was in kindergarten she would get up at six every morning to watch the Muppets. After school she would watch television, cartoons such as The Care Bears until her mother would return to their suburban home from her job as a secretary. This added up to about five to six hours of television a day, a pattern of viewing that would continue, though the shows would change, through high school. She says she probably would have read more if her mother had limited her television viewing. "We never had set hours of watching television; if we had I think I would have read more."*

Now an exercise science major, Julie has a weekly schedule of programs she watches: Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Felicity, Dawson's Creek, and Friends. These programs are communal events in her residence hall. "Pretty much the whole floor will get together in one room and watch it together," she says. "It's fun to watch with other people and to question and laugh at things, like the reason behind a particular episode. You just laugh at it and say, 'What? Where did that come from?'"

Peter is a political science and psychology major whose parents -- a physicist and a social worker -- did not own a television until Peter was twelve. "They didn't think it would help development. They thought it would stymie the growth of intelligence and stuff." Still, when he had the opportunity at friends' or relatives' houses he would eagerly watch Sesame Street, Mister Roger's Neighborhood, or Saturday-morning cartoons. Peter was home-schooled until high school and, even after his grandparents left a

television in his house after a visit, was allowed to watch no more than an hour of television each day.

Now that he is living on campus, where all residence halls are wired for cable, he says he watches television "all the time, five or six hours a day." His preference is for sitcoms such as The Simpsons – which he considers the "best-written show on TV" – or reruns of Saturday Night Live. He has no problem defining the source of bad television. "Terrible writing. There are the same basic setups, the same basic lines out there all the time," he says. They can't write something original. It's just the same tried-and-true methods. 'Oh, we'll just put this one there because we had a show before it that people seemed to watch, so we'll do it again.'"

Kevin lives off campus with a friend where, "The TV's always on in our apartment. It's always on because there's not a whole lot to do up here. I pretty much turn it on when I come in the door and shut if off when I go to bed." He is a mechanical engineering major who is taking first-year composition after having graduated from a community college. His father manages a car dealership and his mother teaches first grade.

Kevin's television preferences include the motorsports channel, history documentaries, The Simpsons, The X-Files, and "reality" shows such as World's Wildest Police Chases. Yet though the television is always on in his apartment, it doesn't mean he is continually focused on the screen. "I usually read (automotive and racing) magazines while I'm watching TV unless it's a really interesting show. I've got my magazine rack right next to my TV chair...So I'll have something on and be looking at magazines, whichever is more interesting, until I hit something (on television) that catches my attention. Then I'll look up."

Television watching for Irene was, when she was a young child, a family matter. "In my early years we usually sat down together as a family and watched TV, except for Saturday-morning cartoons which were just my sister and me." Now that she is in college, her television viewing is still often constructed as a social event. "I probably watch more now because you'll go into a friend's room and the TV will be on and you sit down and have a conversation about it," she says, adding that watching television with her friends is often connected with their conversation. "When the TV show gets to a lull and you talk about your day, it's kind of an escape. If you don't have anything to say you can just watch TV still."

Irene, who has yet to declare a major, says that she makes it a point to limit her television viewing to watching with others because she knows she is susceptible to watching too much of it and not getting her school work done. "My grandmother always used to make a little joke and say I would watch water drip if it was on TV. And I probably would; you never know. I could just sit there and watch it forever whether I'm interested in it or not."

Our students watch television (and so do we). It is a common denominator for first-year students. It is a shared experience that crosses class, gender, ethnicity, area of study, attitude toward reading and writing. Though it may seem to state the obvious, our students have long histories of television viewing that they can and, if given the opportunity, will discuss in detail and with authority. It may not be their only common ground, but, in terms of forms of discourse and communication, it is one of the most powerful and pervasive.

Yet, just as the term "watching" does not do justice to the multiplicity of practices involved in engaging television, students' experiences with television are not monolithic and encompass a complex and often shifting set of practices, preferences, and opinions,

The question then is how do these vast and varied experiences of reading and interpreting television broadcasts influence students' views of writing and reading and help shape their discursive and rhetorical skills? How do the skills students develop from watching television converge with the rhetorical skills we privilege in a writing course? In this chapter I draw on interviews with students in first-year composition courses to explore this question, to attempt to illustrate how students perceive watching television and writing and reading in the academy, and to identify the rhetorical skills students do develop from their deep experiences with television.

Although, as researchers, we can theorize all we want about the nature of television as discourse and the social practices that define the composition classroom, until we talk with our students about these issues we have to admit that we are only guessing at how students may be responding to these forces. It is politically important, in a field such as composition, not only to keep our focus on students and teachers in the classroom, but to engage with them in conversation and to make sure that we listen carefully to what they say. When, as researchers, we assume that we can speak for our students or for composition teachers in the classroom -- teachers who are often non-tenured or adjunct faculty with no political or research voice in the academy -- our actions are intellectually arrogant and politically suspect. As Mary Brydon-Miller notes, in a Participatory Action Research project, the political and social assumptions of the methodology and their implications for all of those involved in the project must be central "components of the research process and the research process itself can be seen and evaluated in terms of its ability to generate broad community participation and on its political, social and economic impact" (660). Although my project could not accurately be defined as Participatory Action Research, the theoretical foundations of such an approach have had a significant influence on how I regard the nature and purpose of knowledge generation. Consequently, my conversations with students and teachers about their experiences and views must lie at the core of this project.

I created this project around extended interviews with students and later watching and discussing television and writing with the same students. Drawing on the model of other qualitative studies of television viewing habits (Morley; Seiter; Liebes and Katz) I believed interviews would allow me to probe in depth the reasons behind students' stated perceptions and preferences about television and about writing. Longer, free-form discussions with students would also help put them at ease when talking about a subject that they have been told was not worthy of discussion in an academic setting. Indeed, as I will discuss later, students' initial responses about their viewing habits and opinions often became less guarded and more complex as the interviews proceeded.

I interviewed fifteen students from four first-year composition courses at the University of New Hampshire over one semester. The students, eight men and seven women, volunteered to be interviewed after I discussed the project in their classes. (Initially eight women volunteered for the project but one never showed up for scheduled interviews.) They knew they would be asked about their experiences and views about television, writing and reading, that the interviews would last about one hour[2] and would be followed later in the semester by two hours of television watching, reading, and discussion with their fellow classmates who had volunteered for the study. The students represented a range of academic interests -- from engineering to nursing to biology to political science to English -- and a range of socio-economic classes from working class rural families to suburban professional families. In terms of cultural diversity, UNH, like most of New Hampshire, is overwhelmingly white and non-Latino. One participant was from Rwanda and had lived in Belgium and France and another Asian-American student's parents were originally from Thailand and China.[3] The interviews were conducted in my office and the television viewing sessions I will discuss in Chapter Four were conducted in the multimedia classroom of the University library. Obviously interviewing fifteen students is not a representative sample. My goal, however, was to get a detailed sense of how some

students addressed these issues and to raise for my readers the question of how their students might respond to similar ideas.

Though some of my colleagues questioned whether I would be able to get students to commit to that much time for a study for which they were neither being paid nor getting course credit, I was confident that there would be an enthusiastic student response to the project. Indeed, when I asked for volunteers I received more than three times as many names as I could use. I suspected that students would be intrigued by the transgresssive aspect of talking about television in the context of teaching writing. I also expected that students would be more interested in talking about a subject that they felt they knew with a great deal of authority, such as television, than they might be with other kinds of research projects.

Going into the interviews, however, I expected there to be several obstacles confronting me as I talked with students about television and writing. To begin with, I expected that students, like most people, would be wary of admitting that they liked watching television, a medium we have all been told time and again is a waste of time As Ellen Seiter notes, talking with a researcher about television:

> can be a touchy subject, precisely because of its association with a lack of education, with idleness and unemployment, and its identification as an 'addiction' of women and children. (The interview) exemplifies the defensiveness that men and women unprotected by academic credentials may feel in admitting to television viewing in part because of its connotations of feminine passivity, laziness, and vulgarity (388).

I also expected students to be wary of describing the full range of programs they watched and instead focus their conversation on programs that carry a more positive cultural cache. This is the, "I-only-watch-PBS" position favored by many academics, though interestingly the culturally acceptable networks for most of the students I interviewed were not now PBS but were Discovery, TLC (The Learning Channel), the History Channel, and A&E. That I was a writing teacher in an English department asking them about television and

writing could only increase their caution and desire to impress upon me that they were people interested in "quality" television, when they were interested at all. My awareness of these suspicions and anxieties on the part of these students was, again, why I felt longer interviews were necessary in order to attempt to convince the students that I was not on a mission to embarrass them or make them feel foolish for watching television. In general I believe I was successful in this attempt; students seemed to believe that I was not out to trap them or make them look foolish and their responses became more candid and expansive.

Talking with people about television often elicits rather cynical comments to the effect that, though others may be taken in and manipulated by the programs and advertisements on television, they themselves see through what is on the screen and are unaffected by it (Seiter 389). This desire to represent oneself apart from the gullibility of the imagined mass audience watching television is not confined to students, but certainly seemed to be present in many of their comments. Yet other comments they made also seemed to indicate how deeply they have been and continue to be influenced by what they watch on television.

Because I expected these kinds of contradictions to emerge in the course of my conversations with students, I needed a way of processing the interviews that would give me both a way to identify and reflect on the nature of these gaps and conflicting statements and a way of considering my own role and biases in these conversations. Toward that end, in interpreting the interviews I used a variation of Lyn Mikel Brown's "Listening Guide" -- developed for use in qualitative psychology. Brown outlines how she listens to taped conversations multiple times, focusing on different elements of the conversation each time (Brown). For example, the first time listening focused on the narrative of the conversation including my role within it as a researcher. The second time listening focused on what the participants said about themselves. The third listening would

focus on what the participants said about the culture and institutions that they referred to and on points of resistance.

The Listening Guide approach also helped me reflect on my role in this project and, more specifically, in these conversations. As a journalist I had a great deal of training and experience in how to "work" the subject of an interview to get the information I wanted. I developed a reasonable talent for constructing questions that would both put my sources at ease and yet lead them toward the quotes I needed for my story. I always knew that people would want to talk about themselves, to tell their side of any story no matter how potentially revealing or embarrassing, and that I could, if I wanted to, manipulate and exploit that desire to be heard. The dividing line between constructing an interview to let students have their say and constructing an interview to get students to say what I needed them to is no less tenuous for a "qualitative researcher" than it is for a reporter on deadline. The pressure to publish the good story, to extract and massage the quotations to get them to come out the way you want them to in order to impress editors and peers is the same on both levels. I always tried to act in an ethical and fair manner as a journalist, and to reflect on the moments when I felt I had fallen short of that mark. I have attempted to do the same with this project. As an added check on my work I have given the students in the project the opportunity at several points to review both the interview tapes and to read what I have written about them and allow them the space in this project to include their response to my work. Though five of the students have taken the time to read parts of the finished project, none asked for changes and, unfortunately, none have decided to respond in writing.[4] In an imperfect world the best I can do is conduct my work with compassion and empathy as guiding principles.

Memories of Television

I watched cartoons and Star Trek. I watched the Smurfs. I liked the Smurfs, and Garfield, the Snorks and the Gummi Bears. Sesame Street, Mr. Rogers, and 321

Contact...I would watch Sesame Street every day twice and Star Trek on Saturday night and Disney on Sunday Night with my Mom and sister, it was a family activity. And then there were Saturday morning cartoons. So I guess that would be at least fifteen hours a week. — Mary, chemistry and physics education major.

If I wanted to gain insights into how first-year students perceived television and writing as discourses I knew I would have to know more about their histories of watching television, reading, and writing. I began each interview by asking the student to recall what she or he remembered watching as a pre-school or kindergarten-aged child, in junior high school, and in high school, and to estimate how many hours a week of television viewing occurred at each age. There was an unsurprising core of uniformity across the earliest television experiences of these students. Sesame Street, Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood, and cartoons ranging from the Smurfs to Loony Toons to Scooby Doo to Spiderman. Most students estimated watching one to two hours of television a day, none estimated less time watching television, with four students estimating that they watched at least four to five hours a day as young children. As with many of the questions I asked students, however, statements they made later in the conversations often seemed at odds with what they initially reported about their past -- and present -- television viewing experiences. As one example, Courtney said that she watched less than an hour a day and that was usually Sesame Street. Later in the conversation, however, she referred to having watched Woody Woodpecker, Caspar the Friendly Ghost and other cartoons as a young child as well as watching game shows with her grandmother. This kind of discrepancy was common among the students I interviewed not only in discussing their childhood viewing habits, but their more recent patterns of watching as well. The seeming contradictions I believe had several sources including students' distinctions between watching regularly and only occasionally, their desire to appear to me as people who had not "wasted" too much time in front of the television, their ability to recall more about their viewing histories as

the interviews progressed, and their shifting definitions of what it means to "watch" television, a critical set of distinctions that I will address later in the chapter.

Most of the students also mentioned a fairly high level of family involvement in their memories of childhood television. There was often a particular, family-oriented show, such as The Cosby Show, that they watched each week with one or more adult members of their family. When they weren't watching with adults, they said that they still watched television most of the time with siblings or friends. What is intriguing is how for every student I interviewed this pattern changed in junior high school and high school to a pattern of watching television alone, often at a second television in the house as their parents watched in a different room. (There are intriguing analogies between this pattern and how print literacy develops that I will cover the in the next chapter.) Yet now, in University residence halls, more than half of the students, including all but one of the women, said that they did the majority of their television watching with other people, though for the men that often centered around watching sports. This pattern of social television viewing in residence halls has been reflected in other quantitative studies that reflect even higher rates of social television viewing of 92 percent for women and 89 percent for men (Porter and Sapp). A distinctive difference for the UNH students I interviewed compared with students of earlier years or in the Porter and Sapp study, however, was that just two years before this project the University had wired all residence hall rooms for cable television. This meant that all students could now get premium cable channels in their rooms and didn't have to go to a common room to watch television -- in the past a more familiar feature of college television viewing. Consequently students often did now choose to watch alone in their rooms and, even for those watching in groups, it usually happened in friends' rooms, not in a common room or lounge. For this project what is important about this return to watching television with others is the level of conversation it facilitates. The nature and significance of this conversation and its implications for the teaching of writing are issues I will discuss later in this chapter.

Ways of Watching

"If I'm watching Comedy Central or some kind of sitcom and they're having a good time laughing I'm just lying back and enjoying myself; it's entertainment. If I'm watching a documentary I'm trying to retain information. If I'm watching news and trying to find out what's going on the world, I'm really having to pay attention" -- David, computer science major.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, "watching" is a slippery and imprecise term for how people engage with what is on television. Though the students I interviewed did not talk about the problematic and overdetermined nature of the word itself, they did make distinctions between different levels of "watching." Just as we know that all reading is not the same, that glancing through a magazine in a waiting room is not the same as doing a close reading of Foucault, these students knew that there were different levels of engagement, attention, and interpretation when they watched television.

Television is a medium of distraction and all of the students I interviewed had at least some experience with having the television on, but only paying it intermittent attention. As Karen, a biology major, noted, "You can do multiple things while watching TV, so it doesn't require much concentration." Some students were like Julie who said she turned it on in the morning while she got dressed, "just so there's noise." Kevin, as I noted above, would have the television on while reading magazines. Peter talked about turning on the television in the afternoon to have it on in the background while he worked on the computer. As initially surprised as I was at this idea of having the computer and television going simultaneously -- I had trouble envisioning how anyone could not be overloaded by the competing screens -- it was not an uncommon practice according to students I interviewed or students in my classes. Karen and Julie both talked about having the television on while they studied. Karen prefaced her remark by saying, "I know this is horrible because I should be concentrating on my homework." Both women stressed that they were aware this was a bad way to study and that they knew that they should stop

doing it. More than half of the other students, when asked directly if they studied with the television on, said that they did from time to time, but again that they knew they shouldn't.[5]

Julie made the distinction between actually watching television herself while she was writing, and having her roommate watching. "Sometimes my roommate has it on the other side of the room. But if I can't see it, if it's not right in my face, I'll be fine. If I just hear it, I'm OK. But if I can see it out of the corner of my eye I'll start watching it," she said. Julie's comment has two intriguing implications. First, it raises the question of the power of the moving images on the television screen versus the power of the sound of the programs. It seems to indicate more of an ability to shut out extraneous sound, the way students have to in residence halls anyway, than to shut out the flickering images on the screen. Several of the students said they could study with the radio on, including talk from announcers and advertisements, but not with the television on because the latter would require their attention and be too distracting. In part this may be caused by the narrative nature of television. A television episode has a narrative that demands at least some level of attention to follow, while a radio tuned to a music station does not have the same narrative. The allure of the show on the screen also underscores the power of television as a visual medium. Though it is true that television also revolves around sound, include almost non-stop talk, there is something about the swift, brilliant, and often innovative use of images that often compels us to look at the screen. Raymond Williams maintained that to get a true sense of the essential visual nature television required turning off the sound and seeing how the use and arrangement of images has a power and often a beauty that transcends the declared content of the program (71). What we often do not realize is how, after years of watching television, our abilities to read and critique these visual elements have grown sophisticated and critical. I will discuss the implications of this visual literacy more fully in the coming chapters.

The second element of Julie's comment that calls for attention here was her distinction between watching television by her own choice and therefore paying at least a fairly close level of attention to the program and of having the television on in the same room when she was engaged in other activities. Someone else may be watching the program intently, but Julie's attention was focused on her work; yet she says that she was aware of the nature of the program her roommate has turned on. Again, Margaret Morse's analogy of television and Interstate highway driving is useful here. The experiences of the driver of a car on the Interstate and a passenger in the same car may be quite different. The driver, though not always intently focused on driving, must always be engaged with the process on some level. The passenger, however, may read or eat or gaze out the window. Even if the passenger spent the entire trip reading, however, she will still be aware that she has been on the Interstate and have some general sense of the conditions of the trip, such as the time of day, the weather conditions, and whether the surrounding environment was rural or urban.

What this means for the students I spoke with, and for the students we teach in general, is that they experience television as discourse on an even more varied level of distraction than is possible through reading and writing. For example, Mary maintained in the first part of my interview with her that she had watched only one hour of television a week, Star Trek: The Next Generation on Saturday nights. Later in the conversation, however, when I asked her if her family watched much television she replied that "my younger sister comes home and turns on the TV and it stays on until dinner. Then after dinner she does her homework and my parents have the TV on until everyone goes to bed." When I asked her what she did during this time when the television was on, she said that she sat in the living room with her family, but that she didn't watch the television. "I just sat in the living room to be with my family and the TV was on," she said. Not only did this explain why Mary displayed a more extensive knowledge of television genres and specific programs than watching only one program a week would provide, but it also

indicated how the pervasiveness of the medium in our lives and our distracted viewing practices can still expose a student such as Mary to the discursive forms that dominate television. There is no corollary to such a practice in the way most of people in our culture experience reading and writing. Reading and writing are generally practiced as individual acts of will that are both solitary and consciously chosen. Even if we are freewriting in a journal or skimming a newspaper, others in the same room with us will not be exposed to the discursive forms we are encountering. For most of our students reading and writing are not experienced as social or communal acts, except in the classroom. As a culture we construct, and even celebrate, reading and writing as solitary, private, and personally illuminating or even transcendent. It is envisioned, as Sven Birkerts writes, as "the most elusive and private of all conditions, that of the self suspended in the medium of language, the particles of the identity wavering in the magnetic current of another's expression" (78). Consequently, even when our students do not consider themselves to be "watching" television, they may still be, at some level, continuing to experience and process the discourse of television from a set running in the same room.

Within the students' conscious acts of television viewing, what they would define as "watching", the students were also aware of the different levels of engagement with the programs on the screen. The advent of remote controls means that students do not describe watching television only as an activity of viewing discrete programs from beginning to end. David talked about what he would do in the afternoon when he had time between classes. "I sit down and flip around until something catches my attention. There's regular channels I hit -- Comedy Central, MTV, VH1, HBO1, HBO2, Showcase, WB, Fox -- and I just keep cycling through till I find something on one of those." He said he would then watch that program until a commercial break. "I usually flip around when the commercial comes on. I'm a classic channel surfer." All but one of the students described at least occasionally engaging in zapping in search of a program to watch or to avoid

commercials.[6] Several also echoed the comments of Joe, a communication major with an English minor, who talked of zapping as an integral part of the way he watches television.

> During a boring part I might be wondering if I could click to another channel and still get back so I don't miss too much of the show I am watching. So I may have a couple of different shows that I'm watching and I'll also be checking on the score of the hockey game and maybe a basketball game and get back without missing too much.

Such a comment not only illustrates a rather astonishing aptitude for keeping up with rapid shifts in the rhetorical content of what is on the screen, but also indicates that the linear and often predictable nature of television narratives, and Joe's familiarity with such narratives, permit him to juggle several programs, understand what is happening with each one, and, even if he misses parts of them here and there, be confident that he will not miss "too much." He has developed rhetorical skills for reading television that allow him to fill in the gaps in his viewing so that he can still arrive at a satisfactorily coherent interpretation of the programs he is zapping among. Zapping also influences how students control the making of meaning from what they watch, an issue I will address in the next chapter.

The question, however, is whether the work and attention necessary to move among different programs and their different narratives and modes of address and still be able to create coherence from them makes a more reflective critical analysis difficult if not impossible. Not only is there no time to reflect, but the intellectual energy necessary to sustain analysis may be too focused in keeping up with the shifts and filling in the gaps. Certainly such a way of engaging television texts is far different from the kind of close attention to individual works of writing and reading that we expect in writing classrooms. When I assign an article, short story, essay, or other piece of writing, I know that my assumption -- or perhaps more accurately my devout wish -- is that my students will read it at least once, uninterrupted, in a setting that allows them to think carefully and critically about the cultural, literary, and rhetorical aspects of the work (not necessarily in that

order). In fact I implore them to read the works more than once and make use of some form of written response -- double-entry journals, response papers and so on, to encourage and enforce some level of reflection about what they have read. Though I don't think I am alone in such assumptions or assignments, there is no doubt that it is a different way of engaging a text than encountering one on television while zapping through several programs.

Most of the time, however, students spoke about watching as engaging with discrete programs. As with most of the television viewing public, they may encounter flow when they watch television, but they talk about it in terms of individual shows. How this gap between experience and interpretation influences their ways of reading television and their ways of reading print is an issue I will address in Chapter Four.

As I mentioned earlier, students talked about doing a variety of other tasks when "watching" television, from reading to getting dressed or ready for bed, to talking with friends in person or on the phone, to spending time online, to cleaning their rooms. Yet even when students spoke about giving their full attention to programs, they continued to make distinctions about their varying levels of interpretive and critical engagement with the programs. As Irene put it, "There's a certain energy level that goes along with (watching) any kind of show." She then classified soap operas as requiring the least amount of engagement because the extended nature of the storylines meant that information missed could be recovered on a subsequent episode, sitcoms such as Friends as requiring more attention to be able to make sure she understood a single episode's plot enough to get the jokes and the resolution, and documentaries as requiring the most attention because of the need to not just hear the information, but to understand it.

Other students made similar hierarchies of genres or specific programs and how much attention they needed to invest in watching a sitcom such as South Park as compared with a more complex drama such as The X-Files or ER. Kevin, who talked of

reading his magazines as he watched television, said that with the "better shows" that wasn't possible:

> Some shows make you think more than others. Like The X-Files, that's a pretty intensive show. You can't just sit down and watch it, you've got to pay attention and remember. They make it so you have to watch. You can't, like with other shows, just tune in or tune out and still pick up what's going on. With The X-Files if you're not watching it you're gone. You can't come back in five minutes and figure out what's going on. That's why I like it.

Other students made almost identical comments about programs such as The X-Files, ER, NYPD Blue, Law and Order and documentaries using words such as "focus", "intensity", "complicated", and "intelligent."[7] The comments focused on the need to pay close attention because of the complexity of the show involved. This kind of watching is neither distracted nor mindless. When students talked about these programs they talked about a level of active watching that required attention, interpretation, and a dialogic engagement with the program as text. It is a similar level of engagement to what we expect students to experience with reading print texts.

Reading and the Loss of Pleasure

"Reading for pleasure definitely stopped in high school," Peter, political science and psychology major.

Four of the fifteen students I interviewed continued to think of themselves as active and avid readers who read with pleasure and enthusiasm outside of what they were given to read for school. Five of the students continued to do some kind of writing, usually journal keeping, outside of their academic assignments. One of the fifteen wrote for his father's newspaper in suburban Boston and another wrote song lyrics for a local band and was also working on a screenplay. Such students are exciting to talk with and no doubt equally exciting to teach. Yet I do not think that this group of fifteen students was unusual for a small state school such as the University of New Hampshire. It would

be unusual to find a group of students the majority of whom were active readers or writers; students who, in other words, sought opportunities to read and write beyond their assignments and talked about writing and reading with the same authority, enthusiasm, and sense of pleasure that all of the students I talked with expressed about television.

Most of the students I talked with related a disturbingly consistent set of experiences when I asked them about their writing and reading histories. They spoke of their early reading experiences with enthusiasm. "I remember reading The Snowy Day (by Ezra Jack Keats); I really liked that," Karen said. "I was read to a lot and I read a lot. I played with my parents about reading and they read chapter books to me. It was a routine thing to do, a fun thing." Students talked about reading Dr. Seuss, Mercer Mayer, Charlotte's Web, Treasure Island, books from the Hardy Boys, Babysitters' Club, and Anne of Green Gables series. Only two of the students said that they couldn't remember reading experiences when they were young.

More than half of the students also talked about positive writing experiences when they were young, writing that they did on their own. "When I was little I used to write stories constantly. I would do chapters and everything and I would illustrate it. I would go all out with it," Irene said. Most of the writing the students described was fiction, poetry or journal writing.

Time and again, however, these students' enthusiasm for reading and writing ends in junior high school or high school. Their stories are depressingly similar: Writing and reading became dull and burdensome as teachers in junior high school and high school focused on exposition, grammar, and New Criticism techniques of close readings of canonical texts.[8] "The teachers took the fun out of reading," Irene said. "That's why I never read on my own because they tortured books. They made you look into them further than I think you should have to look into a book unless you really see it." Courtney talked of her excitement at finding out that S.E. Hinton, the author of the books such as The Outsiders and Rumblefish that Courtney read with such delight, was a woman. "I hadn't

heard that much about women writers and for her to write all of these books about these tough guys, I thought that was cool," she said. Yet by her high school years she said she had come to hate reading. "I read what I had to read in high school. I was supposed to read it, but very often I didn't read it," she said.

Or, as Mary put it, "In high school the attitude was most of you all can't really write, so don't even try. I'd complete all the assignments, but I never did it on my own. I wasn't really encouraged at all."

After these experiences these students never returned to reading books or writing outside of their classroom assignments with the exception of a few who mentioned reading a book or two during summer vacations.

My focus on these comments is not meant as yet another attack by someone in higher education on junior high and high school teachers. Certainly some of them engage in teaching practices that make me cringe (and the same no doubt can be said about people teaching in my University department) and others are gifted and innovative teachers. Many teachers are constrained by budget cuts, low pay, huge numbers of students each semester, and curricular pressures by a public and political culture that believes the latest "literacy crisis" can be solved by standardized tests, grammar worksheets, and a canonical approach to literature right out of E.D. Hirsh's Cultural Literacy version of Trivial Pursuit. Rather what I think is important to note here is the way the students describe pleasure as no longer being part of their experiences when it comes to reading and writing, particularly the kind of reading and writing that are done in English Studies. Not only did the students talk about how they stopped reading and writing on their own -- activities that they had described as previously giving them great pleasure -- but they talked about the lack of pleasure they found in any of the reading and writing they are asked to do in school. Jennifer, a music major, said that for her reading and writing couldn't be fun anymore because in college the point was getting information. "If you're trying to get information, to get the point, then you can't expect to enjoy it," she said. Joe's comment was similar: "I

have a hard time with the reading in college because I can't read just to read. I have to read something I enjoy."

Some of the students I talked with had similar views about writing. "It (writing) is a pain. I don't want to write, but I have to for the grade," Courtney said. Or, as Peter put it: "I'm pretty picky so I try to do a good job, but that doesn't mean I enjoy writing. I don't enjoy it much because it's still too much work and there is still the grade hanging over it." Pleasure and confidence have been replaced with fear of failure, anxiety, and resentment. They have not been encouraged to find the pleasure in reading a difficult text or in discovering their own analysis, or in the craft of writing an incisive and insightful essay with an elegant turn of phrase. As Thomas Newkirk points out, pleasure in writing and reading has been largely replaced in the field of composition by a view of written communication that is grounded in a sense of civic duty and appropriate moral sensitivity (70).

Nor is the view of writing and reading in the academy as a potentially pleasurable experience one they report encountering in their college courses outside of first-year composition. According to Andrew, "When professors want you to write something they just want you to get the information across, get the point across and be done with it. They don't care if the writing is any good -- or if they do care they never say anything about it in class." Or, as Karen put it, "I can't imagine that they (my professors) care all that much about reading or writing or they wouldn't assign us textbooks to read that put you to sleep in ten minutes." Many of the students described reading as an activity that required an unflagging commitment and stamina to mine the printed text for its true yet often buried meaning. It is through this kind of construction of each activity that, in David Marc's words, "Television viewing makes reading seem stoic and reading makes television viewing seem like relief" (132).

When students did talk about finding pleasure in reading or writing it was, with only two exceptions, in the realm of what they considered "creative" writing. "I would

much rather read stories that allow you to be someplace else and imagine other worlds than the subject-oriented stuff I have to read in classes, the stuff that's dry and hard to read. You wouldn't read it and say, 'Wow, that was so exciting,'" Mary said. "I like reading that can take me somewhere else," Courtney said, "That can let me be the character or the writer." Though fewer students spoke of finding pleasure in writing, when they did they connected pleasure with what they considered to be "creative" writing such as poetry, fiction, or autobiography that allowed them to make use of emotion and imagination. They liked to write when they could express their emotions and use description and dialogue. The split between "creative" and "academic" writing was as clear and unbridgeable for these students as it is for many professors in the academy: The still widely held assumption in higher education that emotion, pleasure, and imagination are intellectually suspect was one that these students had accepted and repeated. They knew that reading and writing in college, with perhaps the exception of some of the assignments in their first-year composition course, would be detached and analytical and the mark of intellectual maturity. The underlying message they had accepted was, "Academic writing and reading are good for you, but you aren't going to like it."

It is important to consider this perception of reading and writing in the context of students' descriptions of their television viewing which were almost without exception related with confidence and authority as pleasurable experiences. Jennifer said, "The television is there to just let you kick back and enjoy yourself. It's just a good and easy thing to be able to do." Courtney said that watching television was relaxing and that she could use it "to escape the stresses of the day." Or, as Joe put it, "Sometimes I'm just in the mood for mindless entertainment. After a long day with my brain fried from school I like to watch something stupid I can laugh at. I can't always be thinking."

Pleasure and affect had an influence not only on how students perceived reading, writing, and television, but also on the level of articulateness students could display about the televised texts they encountered. As the psychological research makes clear, material

or events that provoke emotional responses are easier to retain and recall. That television is a medium that these students watched in order to have an affective response, and then talked about that affective response with their friends, rehearsing their reactions to the programs, means that it is in some ways more available to students to talk about with authority and articulateness. We all do a better job talking about the things with which we are deeply familiar and which provide us with pleasure and emotional stimulation. For these students television fits such a description.

Students can be quite defensive about the need for television to remain pleasurable and unexamined. Patricia Caille, in writing about the use of film in composition courses, notices a similar defensiveness about pleasure and resistance to analysis. For her students, "Intellectual critical work constitutes a threat to that pleasure, and students often regard it as unconvincing, as reading too deeply into what is mere entertainment" (4). Students can respond to the acquisition of a critical eye and vocabulary by noting that they now appreciate the work, be it film or television, in ways they had not before -- but they don't enjoy it as much (Wood 281). How we acknowledge, define, and approach the tension between criticism and pleasure is a question we need to consider more often as composition teachers. How that question can be approached to examine the relationship between television and writing in a first-year composition course is an issue I will discuss further in Chapter Five.

As well as being pleasurable, the students' comments about watching television almost always defined it as passive. "There's less imagination with TV (than with reading). You do less work with your TV. You just watch the box and the box tells you everything," Mary said. They could not identify any skills they used while watching television. Such an attitude is, again, our culture's broadly accept view of watching television and these students certainly had internalized that view.

It is also important to note that these students, as well as students I have taught, when asked about their experiences with reading and writing, even when the question is as

general as the preceding phrase, confined their discussion to works they regarded as appropriate to discuss with a writing teacher: literature they had read in English courses, other novels and imaginative writing such as poetry or stories, and occasionally journal writing, that they had done outside of their classes. If, however, I explicitly broadened the definition of reading and writing to include newspapers, magazines, e-mail, surfing the Web, the amount of writing and reading they described increased. Their descriptions also reintroduced a sense of pleasure in these activities. "Sometimes I'll just read a friend's trashy magazine like Cosmo, just to relax and have a laugh," Karen said. At the same time, they often prefaced their descriptions of reading the sports pages or magazines such as Cosmopolitan or Self or writing e-mails to friends, with apologies to indicate to me that they understood such reading and writing to be less worthy than what they were doing in school. It was pleasurable, but not acceptable to talk about in school with a writing teacher.

If some of their reading habits evoked comments about "guilty pleasures", there remained a general sense that reading and writing were "good" activities. Bruce said, "There is no such thing as wasted reading. It's always good to do it, even if it's something not that great, because it makes you work your mind." Student descriptions of reading were always as active, most often as requiring them to use their imaginations as they read. As Irene said, "I have to be in the mood (to read) and have to work the entire story in my head. On TV you see it there. You see what the scene looks like, whether it's dark or whether it's light, whether the wind is blowing. In a book you have to work to create that." The engagement with the imagination reflects a common cultural argument about the benefits of reading that these students had no doubt heard in school and in the popular media. Television, by contrast, was always described as a wasteful and useless, but highly pleasurable activity, even after students had talked about things they had learned from the programs they considered to be high quality. Though they would talk about the programs they enjoyed or ones they thought had been intelligent and worth watching, they would

then add comments such as Courtney's "But I know that I'm wasting my time no matter what I've been watching. It's mindless." Such added comments and asides reflected both a sheepishness and a defensiveness about watching television. Peter, in a more direct and critical comment than most, said, "I can see how people may think it is contributing to the dumbing down of America. I would say it contributes to the dumbing down of me too. It doesn't spark any kind of intellectual activity. It's just there and a lot of times it is inane. Even the shows I enjoy watching don't really get you to think about things." In part I believe that these comments were added because these students knew they were talking with a writing teacher in an English Department. On the other hand, the students' sense that they should add such comments and disclaimers is yet again indicative of the cultural status of television in the academy and in the culture at large.

Finding the Form

"There was one episode of Buffy where she was losing her powers and she was about to get stabbed and you know they're not going to kill her off. They can't do that. So you know she's going to be OK." Julie, exercise science major.

The conventional mythology is that prolonged exposure to television, whether as purposeful watching or electronic wallpaper, has turned the populace, including many students, into mindless viewers lacking the capacity for critical thought. Yet to watch and process a television program requires a decoding of the information, a reading of the "text". The students I talked with for this project could not only speak with authority about the content of different programs, but could talk at length and in detail about rhetorical elements of television programs such as form, audience, and style. Their comments were perceptive and sophisticated, even if they did lack a critical vocabulary that would help them explain their thoughts in ways that we would immediately recognize as rhetorical analysis.

To watch closely a television program such as ER or The X-Files or NYPD Blue is to realize that, week in and week out, such shows present viewers with complex narrative structures that require attentive and sophisticated rhetorical work to interpret. One episode of ER, for example, will contain several distinct narrative lines and jump between them, so that every narrative is fragmented. Some of the storylines will be resolved within the hour, others not. Stylistically the episode will use overlapping dialogue, jump cuts, partial scenes, rapid edits, and fragmented dialogue.

If we consider a television program as "a motivated bid for attention and action, more or less open to resistance or negotiation" (Morley 208), then we must consider that the viewer, in order to read and make decisions about resistance or negotiation, must have certain rhetorical skills. Perhaps the most easily accessible and sophisticated of these skills on the part of students is the recognition of form and genre. The students I spoke with were particularly good at recognizing and interpreting the form of television programs, in part because most programs, in order to attract and maintain viewers from one week to the next, use a similar form for each episode. The form of the program acts as a template for each week's episode, so that any viewer gets to experience the essential form of the program time and again. The ability to recognize a repeated form and to know where in that form to find necessary information is an important skill in reading many print texts as well, be they newspaper articles or the reporting of an experiment with a literature review, methods section, results section, and discussion. Again, however, it is important to note that the ability to discuss the form of television programs does not necessarily mean that these students used the vocabulary we would expect in doing so. For example, when I would ask a student to describe the "form" of a favorite television program, such as The X-Files, I would usually get a puzzled look and a reply of "I don't know what you mean." If, however, I rephrased the question as, "Describe for me a basic episode of The X-Files," I would get a reply like the following from Kevin:

> I don't think there is one. That's why the show has such a following, you never know what is going to happen. But the basic episode usually starts out with something weird happening in a very ordinary place and nobody knows why. Then we see (FBI agents) Scully and Mulder come in to investigate, though they are usually doing it against the wishes of their boss. Then they investigate and he (Mulder) thinks it's one thing, usually something weird and supernatural. She (Scully) thinks it's something else that's explainable by science. And they spend most of the show arguing about it. Meanwhile, they keep getting in more trouble with their bosses. Then they find out what it is, and he's right that it is weird, and they have to go kill it or whatever. Sometimes they kill it or sometimes they don't. There's usually a twist at the end that leaves you watching it and realizing that it isn't all over yet. That's when I find myself saying, "That's it? Oh come on!"

Though Kevin begins his response by saying that he doesn't think there is a form, or even a "basic episode", he then goes on to describe the form of the show in a way that anyone who has seen an episode will recognize as quite accurate. When I pointed out to him that there did seem to be a form to the episodes and that he certainly seemed to know what it was, he replied that, though he'd never thought about it like that before, the idea of form was "pretty cool."

Kevin was not alone in being able to understand and articulate, in his own terminology, the basic narrative traits that Sarah Kozloff notes are found in most television series including "predictable, formulaic storylines; multiple storylines intertwined in complex patterns and frequently interconnecting; individualized, appealing characters fitting into standardized roles; functional setting and scenery; complex interweaving of narrative level and voices" (93).

Often student responses to questions about form indicated not only that they understood and recognized the form, but that they also recognized the repetitiveness and the predictability that it could encourage. You can hear such a critique in Julie's explanation of the form of Dawson's Creek:

> It's usually about the characters Joey and Dawson and how they're best friends. And they took the relationship a step further but now they're best friends again. So each episode is full of "Oh I'm over you. Oh I'm not over you." back and forth like that. And you know they're not over each other so you're just wanting to tell them to go out together and get it over with. Her new boyfriend is supposedly gay and

> that has just come out of nowhere -- I mean where was that coming from? Right now it's usually focused on Dawson and Joey and the other plots are just sidelights to that.

Julie said that she and her friends watched Dawson's Creek regularly, but did not take it seriously, instead using it as a target for ridicule and amusement. "It's so unrealistic, they are supposed to be 16 year olds and yet they talk like they're so intelligent. It's funny to watch and make fun of."

Students could both understand and explain the forms of their favorite shows. They were also able to locate those shows within broadly understood genres or to explain, as in Courtney's critique of form in ER, where individual programs eluded the larger categories of most genres:

> There's a conflict between certain people and then the next week they all love each other and then new people come and, of course, they have romances with the old people. Then Carter will screw up and everyone will get all over him and then they'll all go out and play basketball and feel better. I mean it's just a soap opera, but it's a respectable soap opera I guess. It's not just trash. It's not "my brother's sister died in a crash but now she's back because we sent her to this other place where they made her alive again." But ER is a more real-life soap opera because it is in the workplace and so people would fall for each other in a place where they work so closely and with a lot of emotion. And it's been the same people for so long and you see their relationships grow and fail and come back. Real life is like that. You get into an argument with your friends and then somehow after a while you're back together.

As with other students, Courtney used the genre of "soap opera" to explain the melodramatic elements of the program. Yet, as with other students, she also realized that genre descriptions such as "hour-long drama", "situation comedy", "soap opera." or "hospital drama" or "detective drama" would only provide broad similarities. A program such as ER would have to be explained in terms of its individual rhetorical characteristics. Other students often made similar broad statements about genre, with references such as "stupid sitcoms" or the "TGIF family-type sitcoms" or "science-fiction shows", yet would often, in discussing a specific program, explain where and why it did and did not conform to the expectations of that genre.

When these students would talk about the form of the programs they watched they also demonstrated a knowledge of the narrative conventions of television shows such as repetition of characters, the need to resolve individual episodes but not the central problematic of the series, and the temporal constraints of programs. Julie's comment at the beginning of this section about the need to keep Buffy alive and slaying vampires from week to week is one illustration of this awareness of the conventions of series television. In a similar comment about the need to perpetuate a series rather than resolve it, Irene said that "Soap operas are just an entanglement of story lines that never unravel. And that's how they suck you in. You know they're never going to end and you know they're stupid, but you watch them anyway."

Courtney's comment about the way scenes set on the basketball court next to the hospital are often used as settings for personal and narrative resolutions at the end of episodes of ER demonstrates her understanding of the need for repetition in a series. And Mary, in talking about Star Trek: The Next Generation, noted that, "no matter how bad the problem is, you know that you can count on the fact that they'll get it worked out in an hour." Several other students also talked about the sense of comfort they felt in the predictable resolution of narratives within the temporal constraints of a given episode.

Paradoxically, the predictable and repetitious nature of series television, the elements that students know and can explain so clearly, are also those that often come in for the harshest criticism. David said that it did not take watching much television to become skilled at predicting the form and plot of most programs. "Because I watch a lot of sitcoms and they recycle so many old ideas, you can watch one and say, 'OK, he's lying to this girl. She's going to find out and then they're going to get back together.' I usually change the channel at that point." Peter had a specific example of what he defined as "terrible" television because it relied on an oft-repeated form:

> Two Guys, A Girl, and a Pizza Place. This is one of the most generic shows on TV. How many millions of times has that thing been done? A bunch of slackers

> sitting around a pizza place or coffee shop and they just sit there and talk back and forth and have the same subplots repeated week after week like "Oh, so-and-so has a relationship and the other person doesn't want to have the relationship." It's old and boring.

Julie attributed the problem of the predictability of television programs to the need to continue to produce new episodes week after week. It was impossible, she said, for anyone to be able to come up with enough new story lines to keep any television program fresh and unpredictable. That was why she said that she was currently enjoying the drama Felicity, in its first season at the time of this project, because it had not been on long enough to go stale. "Felicity is a new show so it hasn't gotten to that point where they're digging for more things to write about, where they're just desperate for new things to write about and just trying so hard to hang onto the audience any way they can," she said.

The other rhetorical aspect of form that students talked about in terms of television was how the ongoing nature of the series format allowed the form and content of programs to change. Kevin, for example, said that he thought that episodes of The Simpsons had become more complex over the years, containing multiple story lines with more surrealistic twists. And Mary noted that, as the years went by on Star Trek: The Next Generation, the plots and themes in the episodes changed as characters evolved and developed histories of behavior. In fact some television viewers become so attentive to changes in their favorite series that they can comment on evolving trends or flaws in the continuity of the series. Such comments are often the focus of online newsgroup discussions of television series as I will discuss later in the chapter.

When I asked these students to talk about the form (or the "basic kind) of any kind of writing -- from letters to emails to essays to short stories to poems to newspaper articles -- most of them could neither come up with an example, nor, if furnished with a specific task such as explaining the form of an essay or article they had recently read in a University course, give anything close to resembling the detailed and authoritative descriptions they offered of television programs. Most of the students would identify a

genre and a characteristic of that genre, such as essays are usually non-fiction, but could not talk about possible rhetorical forms within that larger genre. Three resorted to referring to the form of the five-paragraph theme they had been taught in high school; yet even they could no longer explain that form in detail or offer a specific example of it. Two other students noted that "poetry has structure to it" but again could not remember what such a form might be or offer an example of it. Only one student, David, who writes song lyrics and is working on a play, could talk in detail about rhetorical form in those writing projects. Similarly, when I asked the students whether they thought they could or did use the forms of television programs in their writing, all but one said they could not see how that would happen.

"Direct and Fast"

"Television helps me understand more about the people around here. I don't expect people here to understand me because I am the only one here and because my culture is really different. So it is easier for me to try to understand them. That way I can be a part of them instead of trying to be a part of me," Etienne, undeclared major.

For Etienne, television is an important source of learning discursive patterns and rhetorical forms that he can then apply directly to his writing. Etienne is from Rwanda and has been in the U.S. for two years. As a child his family lived in Belgium and then France for a number of years and he has also lived for shorter periods in Kenya and Tanzania. He speaks five languages, with French being his most fluent, though he is fluent in English as well. Having lost his parents in 1994 he now lives with his sister and works in a University dining hall.

Though he reads a great deal outside of class, particularly John Grisham and Tom Clancy popular thrillers, he also reported watching about two hours of television a day. The two programs he talked about in most detail were Politically Incorrect and 20/20. Though he said he had not been particularly interested in American politics when he first

arrived here, he said that watching Politically Incorrect not only provided him with political insights[9], but with insights into the ways in which people in this culture talk and debate. "When I watch that show I understand how things are, how people think around here and how they can put such thoughts into words," he said. Etienne said that he read The New York Times every day to get a "balanced and factual" sense of what was going on in the world. He looked to Politically Incorrect for a sense of both analysis and how "real people would talk about such issues of the news." He used as an example the stories surrounding the Monica Lewinsky/Bill Clinton scandal:

> I like reading about it in the paper, but I really liked watching them talk about it on Politically Incorrect because I could understand their feelings. I could also learn about how people here talk about their political feelings. It is very direct and very strong. You must say, "I think he's right" or "I think he's wrong" and then be ready to be very fast with your reasons behind your point. That is how people are here, direct and fast, and you have to be that way too if you argue about politics.

Etienne also said he watched some sitcoms and had a clear sense of the forms of those programs which he saw as quite similar to programs he had watched in France and Belgium. (He noted that very little on television in Rwanda, which was dominated by news, government political programs, and local music, could be seen as comparable to American or European television.) When watching sitcoms with his sister he said that he could often predict where the plot was headed, much to his sister's consternation.

In terms of his writing, Etienne said he made the most direct application of television from the news magazine 20/20. Though he said he watched 20/20 primarily for the content, he also said that he was aware of the form and tried to apply that form to his writing in his first-year composition class:

> It gives me an idea of how to write. if I could write an essay like 20/20 I think that would be really good because of the drama, the way it flows, the structure. It keeps you waiting and I try to do that in my writing...In 20/20 if he (the presenter) is talking about something that is happening at that moment he will turn to the camera and say "And then he did this and then this." I try to do that in my essays. And if two people are talking (in an essay) I'll try to write as if I'm there watching them at that exact moment as I would see it on television.

In using such a form, there are both strengths and problems for him as a writer. What is particularly interesting about Etienne is not that his writing is influenced by the forms he sees on television, but is his self-awareness of the process. This self-awareness was never evident in the comments of other students about television and its possible influence on their writing, even when their writing also seemed to reflect the television forms they had become so familiar with and adept at reading. For students reared amid the cacophony of American popular culture, the ubiquitousness of television may make it virtually invisible to them as a discursive force. Etienne's comments again indicate the fertile ground that awaits further cross-cultural research on this subject.

The Audience at Home

"There are some programs that seem to speak right to me. Others, I don't know who would be watching them, to tell you the truth." Jennifer, music major.

Although the students I spoke with could identify and critique the forms of the shows they watched, there were two limitations on their insights that are important to address. First, though the students would talk about zapping around the channels or about watching several different programs in an evening, their conversations about form continued to focus on discrete programs. In part this was a result of the questions I asked about specific programs, though those were usually follow-up questions to their lists of discrete programs as what they "watched" on television. It also indicates the degree to which, even as most television viewers experience the "flow" Raymond Williams describes as distinctive to the medium -- and they can decode and interpret that flow for their own ends -- their discussions of television remain structured by the concept of television as consisting of discrete programs. This indicates the degree to which the cultural strength of the discreet print text as the norm of public discourse remains and has been extended to television. It also indicates a gap between the way students watch television and the way in which they talk about it (a gap they share with most television viewers). In Chapter

Four I will illustrate how, when students are watching television they engage with the "flow" of programs and advertisements and promotional announcements. Yet when they talked about that viewing experience they talked about the discreet units, not the experience of entering the flow itself.

The other limitation in students' conversations about form was the restriction of their understanding of form to narrative. Though they would distinguish between different genres such a sitcoms or soap operas or documentaries, they would refer to the work in every genre or program as "the story" and they would discuss the characteristics of each genre or individual program in narrative terms. Each program had a plot, characters, climax and so on. For example, Irene, in discussing nature documentaries, said, "A documentary will give you the story of some animals. It will start when they are young or at the start of a season or something and will tell you their story until the main ones are grown up and it's all over." Given that television, across genres, focuses so heavily on narrative, as I discussed in Chapter One, this perception of form is not surprising. As Pierre Bourdieu notes, "Television calls for dramatization, in both senses of the term: it puts the event on stage, puts it in images. In doing so it exaggerates the importance of the event, its seriousness, and its dramatic, even tragic character" (On Television, 19). And television programs such as documentaries and news programs refer to themselves as stories or collections of stories. The result of this emphasis on story for students seems to be twofold. First, every work gets reduced to the idea of story. First-year composition teachers -- and other writing teachers as well -- are often puzzled or frustrated at the way in which their students refer to essays or articles as "stories." Often students continue to refer to the works as "stories" even after extended classroom discussions about different written genres.

The second result is that students have either not experienced or do not have the critical vocabulary to think about other rhetorical genres and forms such as exposition or argument. What passes for argument on television, either daytime talk shows or political

panel shows (which none of the students I talked with reported having watched) is not, in fact, what most rhetoricians would recognize as any kind of argument. On the daytime talk shows, Margaret Morse points out that the material presented is often controversial, but just as often trivial (45). Rather than address pressing public issues of the day, such programs focus on the private affairs of people without power. These issues are not worked through slowly and deliberately over the long term using the approaches of argument taught in rhetoric courses, but instead privilege "a kind of discursive virginity...in which something is disclosed or done or someone is confronted, preferably for the first time, live" (46). This disclosure is intended to provoke an emotional response from all of the parties involved, not to lead to a greater understanding of the issue involved.

Political panel programs, from Politically Incorrect to Nightline to The McLaughlin Group, exhibit not rhetorical argument, but the expression of opinion in an almost ritualistic dramatic structure. As Margaret Morse notes that rather than addressing complex issues inclusively and with a goal toward long-term understanding or resolution, opinion and talk shows on television prefer compact and emotionally exaggerated statements that provide a kind of public spectacle rather than any form of debate (46). The economic structures that help define the form of discourse on television privilege this kind of form, according to Morse. "Television discourse is with few exceptions a function of the market value of time sold to advertisers and sponsors, a crippling limitation on public and civic life" (47) As a consequence, Morse contends that, "The discourses that could bind disparate social groups together, build empathy, and convey a sense of responsibility for society as a whole are rather feeble on television" (47). Our students may have learned about exposition or argument in school, but they have certainly neither seen it or understood it from television.

In addition to form, the other rhetorical element of television that the students seemed to have the most detailed understanding of was audience. Most of the students

could quickly identify what they perceived to be the intended audience of a television program they watched.[10] For example, Courtney could identify Loveline on MTV as intended for "college kids, you know 18 to 25 and with some money." Peter said that South Park is definitely a guy show. College kids. Well, probably mainly for guys from junior high through college. Certainly nobody over 25." But he said that South Park was certainly going for a different audience than "some Lifetime drama about 'My husband beats me and I had to kill him in self-defense' and stuff like that that they are obviously expecting suburban women to watch." Irene said that while Friends would primarily appeal to women in their twenties, soap operas were meant to appeal to women over a wider range of ages. Kevin said that The X-Files would appeal to UFO buffs and those interested in the supernatural, but also for those who had "grown up on conspiracy theories like the whole JFK thing." The students were also aware of when programmers were shifting to a different target audience. David noted how MTV and VH-1 had changed. "MTV is turning for rap and now VH-1 is moving from older audiences with Celine Dion and more toward the younger audience with videos like from the Bare Naked Ladies."

When these students discussed audiences, they demonstrated an understanding that the audience for a program could vary considerably within a particular genre. For example, they could talk about The X-Files and ER as dramas, but explain that the latter probably drew an older, and broader audience or that Malcolm and Eddie and Friends were both sitcoms, but that the former would draw a larger African-American audience than the latter. Audience was also determined by the channel and timeslot, according to the students. Particularly in an age of multiple cable channels, students could identify the kind of audience a specific channel was targeting. They would talk about Comedy Central, The WB, and Fox as being channels for people their ages and identify A&E and The History Channel for an older audience. And Joe said that PBS would be mostly for "older college-professor types." These distinctions are similar to the ones that experienced

readers make when looking at a newsstand and seeing Newsweek, The National Review, The Nation, The Atlantic, Redbook, and Sports Illustrated and understanding how the intended audience of each publication will influence its content. These students understood that the content on networks or on individual programs was shaped by the programmer's conception of the intended audience. More than half also said that programs earlier in the evening were for younger children, in the middle evening for an older audience, and late programs were for college-age audiences. As they changed channels or one show ended and another began, these students understood that the target audience for the program might be changing.

That most of the students could identify the intended audience of a television program does not mean that they could do so for every program. Indeed, a number of times students would follow a detailed discussion of the audience for one program only to follow it by saying that a different program was intended for a general audience. Kevin, for example, said that "networks just want the biggest audience they can get for their programs. So they'll just try to hook anybody anyway they can, even with shock value." He said he didn't see the documentaries on The History Channel as having a different intended audience than The Jerry Springer Show. "Anyone could be watching any of them," he said. The students had a harder time identifying the audience of a more traditional television program, such as ER or Law and Order or Seinfeld, than they did with more unusual programs such as South Park.

Although many of the students could make distinctions about the intended audience of program on the basis of age or race or gender, none of them mentioned social class as a determining factor. Given difficulty of addressing social class as an issue in our culture -- and the way it is so often avoided or elided in college courses as well -- it is hardly surprising that class does not register as an influential or appropriate factor in considering audience.

Irony and Interpretation

"A TV show may be fun to watch, but you have to realize that you can't take it too seriously. I mean everyone has seen it all before, so now you can just laugh at it. It's just TV, you know." Bruce, computer science, major.

The rhetorical element students had the most trouble articulating, if not recognizing, was style. For most of the students it was relatively easy to provide examples of shows with different styles -- even within the same genre -- such as South Park and The Simpsons or Beverly Hills 90210 and ER or The X-Files and Buffy the Vampire Slayer. What was more difficult for the students was to identify what constituted the style of a particular television program and how that might be different from another program in the same genre. They did not, in general, talk about the written stylistic elements of the show, the diction in the dialogue, written metaphors, and so on, nor did they talk about the visual style, the lighting, camera angles, mise en scene, etc.

There were a few notable exceptions. David noticed how the opening shots of many scenes in The X-Files were accompanied by subtitles looking like typewriter typeface giving the location and the time. Such subtitles were included to give the show a sense of authority, as if it had been put together by the FBI, he said. And Courtney noted that in ER narrative lines were often traded as one character would walk past another. And two students, David and Peter, could talk in some detail about the style in the writing of some programs. David, for example, noted that the writing style of his favorite television programs such as Monty Python's Flying Circus and favorite movies, the films of Kevin Smith (Mall Rats, Clerks, and Chasing Amy), often began with a seemingly normal premise and then introduced an absurd variable either into the dialogue or into the scene (The Ministry of Silly Walks, for example) into the premise and asked the participants to continue to do their best to act normally. He added that he and his friends had watched these episodes and films numerous times and quoted them at length to each other. Peter said that he liked the way the writers of shows such as The Simpsons and South Park

could use the flexibility of animation to "bring the extreme and ridiculous" into the everyday. Animation allowed the children on the shows to speak with adult language and perceptions and you are willing to believe it, he said. "The characters still say normal things but in abnormal situations," he said.

The stylistic element that the students understood more clearly than others, however, was irony. Again, none of the students used the word "irony" to describe what they were seeing in shows such as The Simpsons, South Park, Seinfeld, or Late Night with David Letterman, but it certainly was the quality they were describing. A significant part of the appeal for Peter of The Simpsons was its self-mocking irony. "Obviously they don't make fun of it (television) too much because they want you to watch the show," he said. "But it's a way of saying 'We don't take all this too seriously. We know it's TV.'" The idea that nothing on television should be taken too seriously, and that as viewers we are all in on that joke, came up in some form in many of the conversations. It was evident both in comments about programs that are overt in their self-reflexive irony such as the ones listed above, and in the comments by students concerning some of the more conventional programs, as in Courtney's earlier comment about the form of ER, "Then Carter will screw up and everyone will get all over him and then they'll all go out and play basketball and feel better." She understood the convention of ending the episodes with some form of reconciliation among the characters; yet she also understood that such moments of resolution and reconciliation were manipulative, predictable, and subsequently suspect. This ironic stance in relation to the material on television was not consistent for any of the students. Indeed the speed with which these students as viewers could move from sentimental affect to cynical irony and back again while watching television was astonishing and is an idea I will discuss more fully in Chapter Four. For now, however, it is enough to note that, for these students, it is the most easily recognizable element of style.

Though these students do recognize and can explain these different rhetorical elements of the television programs they watch, in general they use this knowledge as a means toward interpretation, not critical analysis.[11] In other words, they use their rhetorical knowledge of television programs to help themselves make meaning from discrete units in the televised flow. They are able to manage the rapidly shifting rhetorical moments on television and quickly judge the nature of the form, the intended audience, and the style as they make meaning from what is on the screen. How this works in practice is something I will discuss in Chapter Four as I talk about watching television with these students. This rhetorical knowledge of television genres and conventions does, however, enable these students to engage in a level of interpretation that is much harder for them produce when engaging with the more unfamiliar genres and conventions of writing and reading they are asked to master in a first-year composition course. Interpretation is a step in reading that too often in composition or literature courses at the college level we take for granted. We are either theoretically uncomfortable or pedagogically uninterested with the question of "what does this work *mean*?" and want to get quickly beyond that to analysis. Yet interpretation is a necessary step that we all engage in before we get to analysis. We ask what it means before we ask why. Though I disagree heartily with her dismissal of high theory as irrelevant to teaching writing, I do find myself agreeing with Anne Berthoff that the idea of interpretation and the consideration of how we make meaning out of what we read and write is often absent in current conversations about composition and rhetoric (671). If, as writing teachers, we want students to write with meaning and purpose we have to encourage them to read for meaning and purpose. And reading for meaning and purpose is exactly what many students do when they watch what they consider to be "good" television.

"Good" TV and Emotional Satisfaction

"If I watch a nature show or something I go away thinking, "Wow, I actually learned something." Or if I watch something funny I'll go away feeling better about myself. TV can influence the way you feel, pleasantly." Irene, undeclared major.

The students I talked with, like most people I know, do not watch television indiscriminately. To be sure, there are times when people, including some of these students, will switch the set on out of boredom and end up watching programs that are not interesting to them, much in the same way we will read magazine articles we don't really care about to pass the time in a waiting room. These students, however, made choices about what they watched and those choices were based on a sense of what constituted "good" or "bad" television. Going in to the interviews with students I half expected that my question about how they would define good or bad television would be met with an "I-don't-know-but-I-know-it-when-I-see-it" response. Instead, most of the students could articulate criteria that helped them define the quality of television they watched. Those criteria could be divided into three areas: rhetorical considerations of form and plot; content considerations including idea or character development; and considerations of emotional impact.

A number of the students said that they defined good television in terms of how successfully the plot of a show surprised them or how the form of the show itself worked against the conventions of its genre. Joe, for example, said that he liked it when sitcoms he watched would introduce a more serious plot line in the midst of the comedy. "You're expecting something and when you find it is something else it gets you interested and you want to find out what it is," he said. He gave as examples programs such as All In The Family and MASH that broke new ground by mixing dramatic plot lines into the half-hour sitcom format. He said that programs such as Fresh Prince of Bel Air and Mad About You continued to do that from time to time. Peter expressed a similar attraction to programs that violated the established conventions of programs on the air. "I like something that

pushes the envelope, something that does something that nobody has done on TV before. Something that is daring, maybe a little obscene." He gave as examples programs such as South Park and The Simpsons. Clearly, for Peter, new forms and content appealed to him, yet he also liked the potentially transgressive aspect of these programs. "People don't like it. People decide, 'Blah, blah, blah, the moral fiber of America is going' and they try to call in the FCC or whatever." For other students such as Irene, the form could be conventional, but the plot must be well constructed so that "I'm sitting on the edge of my seat wondering what will happen next." And Julie said that she liked programs that did not resolve all the plot lines so that "you want to know what happens so you watch it the next week."

For these students, television was not worth watching when it was predictable. Joe said, "I don't like programs that are repetitive. So when you've seen one you've seen them all. I amazed that people still watch them." This was similar to Peter's comment from the beginning of this chapter that bad television programs used, "the same basic setups, the same basic lines out there all the time. They can't write something original. It's just the same tried and true methods. 'Oh, we'll just put this one there because we had a show before it that people seemed to watch, so we'll do it again.'" Kevin said he was particularly resentful when programs didn't deliver on a promise of innovation or surprise. He said. "The worst part is when you're watching something and you're waiting for it to get good because it started OK and so you know it eventually will. But then it doesn't and you've just wasted an hour of your life that you're never going to get back."

Content, obviously, was also an important criterion for a number of students. This criterion came up often when students talked about watching documentary or news programs. Karen said, "I like it when I can learn something, when I feel like there is a part of the world that I'm getting to see that I haven't seen before." She gave as an example a recent documentary she had watched about US veterans of the Vietnam War returning to Vietnam to go on bicycle tour with some of their former adversaries. Kevin said that he

liked documentaries for the same reason. "It's actually information. It's not something they are trying to overhype, but it's actually useful. It's worth something; it's just not mindless entertainment," he said. Several students said that they liked dramas or comedies where the people acted in ways that seemed intriguing or unpredictable. Bruce said that he liked to feel that the characters were as interesting as people he would know. "If they seem too cardboard cutout, then I'm just not interested." The moral nature of the programs also influenced a few of the students such as Joe who said he would not watch programs such as Melrose Place because of their sexual content or professional wrestling because of what he considered inappropriate language.

More than any other consideration, however, emotional impact was mentioned by all but two students as a significant criterion for how they would judge a television program. When talking about how they would judge a television program to be good, the phrase "because it makes me think" often came up in these conversations. Yet when asked to explain or elaborate on that phrase, the students, both men and women, often explained it in terms of the emotional impact it had on them. For example, Jennifer said a drama might make her think about how important her friends were to her. Or Karen said that good programs would "make me happy after I watch them. They make me realize how lucky I am." Television programmers are, of course, in search of the largest possible audience for their programs. They use familiar narratives in appeals to conventional emotions as a way of both appealing to the widest audience and of smoothing off the rough emotional and intellectual edges that might alienate potential viewers (Bourdieu, On Television, 44-45). Many television series episodes and made-for-television movies, then, resolve toward widely held commonplaces that programmers hope will appeal to the largest possible segment of the public. Consequently, the messages that these students, and in all probability many other viewers, get from the shows they consider to be high quality are ones that reinforce the emotional commonplaces that dominate the culture: Love will conquer all; you can always rely on your family; the individual making a moral

stand will triumph. These commonplaces are dismissed by many in composition as either evidence of a naive acceptance of the myth of individualism and, by extension of consumer capitalism, or as simplistic folk wisdom that students who come to college should be learning to abandon (Newkirk 43).

It is similar to the way Winifred Wood says that she has seen students judge films in her courses on the basis of their emotional satisfaction with the ending rather than with the thematic or ideological significance of the events. She notes that her students put themselves inside the narrative and attempt to empathize with the character's feelings. "They refuse to accept plot as a composed structure to be explored in critical terms; they worry about the choices that people in the film made" (284) and how those choices "relate" to the students' own lives. Wood notes that her students did not adopt the traditional, detached critical position when discussing films or use the kind of mediating, analytical language that would distance them from their experiences and emotions (284). Though the students I spoke with were, in general, more aware of conventions of plot and character development on television, their ultimate judgment on a program still often came down to whether it touched on the emotional commonplaces they felt they could "relate to."

The desire for emotionally satisfying endings stands in stark contrast, however, with the ironic detachment many of the same students also displayed toward what they saw on television. Courtney could talk at one moment about the emotional impact of watching an episode of the non-fiction Trauma: Life in the ER about a 16-year-old girl who had been in a traffic accident. "That hit me in the face because she's a peer to me. It hit me a lot because I have parents who love me," she said. And moments later she would ridicule the family-oriented sitcoms on television such as Full House because of their heavy-handed moralizing. "The morals at the end of sitcoms made me laugh a lot because no family is that perfect anyway. And I don't learn my morals from TV," she said. Courtney was not alone in being able to move quickly from affect to irony, from complete

emotional engagement with a program, to a detached cynicism about the manipulative nature of the program or an understanding of the underlying business interests that shaped the form and content of what is produced and broadcast. Again, these students seem able to make these shifts from affect to irony and back in the flash of an advertisement.

To be sure, affect was also the most common criterion that these students mentioned when I asked them to define "good" writing. Though description, plot, dialogue, and ideas were also mentioned by a few of the students, what these students most often said appealed to them about writing was when they could, as Mary put it, "get into the story and become the characters." Empathy and identification with characters in reading was mentioned time and again by students as their central yardstick by which to judge reading. Any causal relationship of this response to similar responses about television is impossible to determine. Whether students judge writing as they do because of their experiences of watching television, or visa versa, or whether both kinds of responses are indicative of this age student at this kind of University cannot be proved conclusively. It remains an intriguing insight, however, in the way it allows us to see a common response to two different kinds of texts in two very different media. Knowing that the affective response is of primary importance in both print texts and television programs helps us understand the identification of pleasure with television watching and reading the students enjoy -- often reading that occurs outside of the classroom. The focus on a detached, analytical response to a text and the suspicion of affect that is the common ideology of many first-year composition classes and other classes in English studies and across the academy, should help us understand at least in part why students would choose to, in their free time, reject reading that they have been told must be analyzed rather than "related to" and embrace television instead.

Again, I am not arguing for the abandonment of analysis. I do believe in the value of stepping back from any idea or work and thinking about its nature in a more abstract, theoretical manner. I believe we should continue to teach students to do that with their

writing and reading as well as with their television viewing. I also believe we can both acknowledge and demonstrate the pleasure that can be derived from the intellectual work of analysis and even more so from the pleasure that comes in moving from analysis and exposition to argument. (In part we can do this by teaching students that analytical writing need not be impersonal, dry, or laden with impenetrable jargon.) In fact most of the teachers of writing and literature I know yearn for students who will find the same pleasure in the works assigned in class that the teachers do. Yet I also believe that too often the affective response, the empathetic and pleasurable connection with a piece of writing, is avoided or denied in writing classrooms. We can, without being anti-intellectual, embrace pleasure. Most of the scholars I know could take the same literary work, find pleasure in a critical analysis of the work, or read it for both affect and analysis, or read it purely for emotional response. We make such movements in our positions as readers with ease; we understand that our engagement with the text is not always a matter of the content of the text, but of what we intend to draw from it.

Yet the understanding that we as teachers have, that we do not always have to read as critics but can read for affect as well, is one that is not always clear to students. I think we too often assume students understand this shifting position and can make it as easily as we can. Students do shift their positions as readers, but not with the facility that they do as television viewers. I heard a number of students talk about intellectual engagement and emotional response when watching some television programs, particularly documentaries and dramas; but only two students combined the intellect and the emotion when talking about reading or writing in the academy, and those instances were only in their first-year composition courses. We can help our students see the connections between their affective responses to television and to printed texts and to explore with them why those connections exists. If we acknowledge that there is both pleasure to be found in the intellectual life and that a response of pleasure does not preclude a response of analysis, we can make our students' readings of print and of television richer.

Talking about the Tube

"When we watch the morning talk shows and there is somebody on there with a big scandal, we sometimes start making fun of the shows. Sometimes that leads into other conversations; we don't necessarily hang onto the television show. Other times it's just about making fun of what's on the TV." Karen, biology major.

Another mythology of television watching is that it is done in isolation and is isolating. As I noted above, sometimes students do watch television alone; yet, particularly in college, they often watch in the company of others. One important outcome of this social viewing is that television watching for many college students involves conversation with others. Students' interpretations of programs and their conclusions about the quality of programs also seem to get worked out in conversations, particularly during the watching of programs. "A lot of times we like to comment on the show," Kevin said about watching television with his roommate. "If it's a stupid show, that's what we talk about. If it's something with more intelligence, like The X-Files, then we're not saying as much, but just asking each other questions about what we think is going on." He added that comments of the latter variety often occurred during commercial breaks. Using commercial interruptions for this kind of processing and interpretation and often speculation of the course of the rest of the episode is not unusual (Allen 110) for viewers whether they are watching alone or with others. What is particularly interesting about the conversations students reported having while watching television tended to stress either interpretation, if they believed they were watching a good a program, or irony if they perceived the program as manipulative or phony. To quote Julie again: "It's fun to watch with other people and to question and laugh at things, like the reason behind a particular episode. You just laugh at it and say, 'What? Where did that come from?'" Even so, the conversations students reported having while watching TV were not usually what we would consider rhetorical analysis. The only analytic comments that students made were when some of the women students reported speculating about the motivations of

characters on programs. But their speculations were about the characters as people, not as constructed elements of a narrative. The interpretive comments about good shows tended to happen during commercials, students said, while the ironic commentary about bad programs usually happened while the show was on. "You don't talk if it's good," Joe said. "If it's not good and one person doesn't like it, that person may start talking." Among these students there seemed to be a slight tendency for men to be more confined to either ironic comments or conversation about plot interpretation. Women, on the other hand, also reported talking more about their level of identification or empathy with the characters in the episodes. There was, however, a significant level of crossover in student comments.

When students talked about television in settings away from the set, the conversations they reported were restricted to the kind of plot review that I discussed in Chapter One. "We'll keep each other updated on the plots of the soap operas," Irene said. Sometimes if there's a really good X-Files on people will be like 'Oh, did you watch this?' and then they'll talk about what happened." Courtney said that talk about television was a matter of keeping friends involved in the events of a program. "You would want to catch up on it if you missed it or get someone else caught up on it," she said. Again, these "day-after" conversations that revolved around the replaying of plot events, the repetition of jokes or good lines of dialogue, seemed intended primarily as a means of sharing and reinforcing the emotional response to a program. There was little interpretation or analysis of the programs reported in face-to-face discussions after the fact.

The distinction of face-to-face discussions is important because there is one area where considerable discussion, interpretation, and even analysis is happening among television viewers, including some students. Online newsgroups and chat rooms about popular programs contain a wide variety of discourse about television series. The comments can range from jokes to trivia to plot summaries and interpretation to ranking of favorite episodes to detailed analyses of specific episodes or of the course of the series

in general. Though individual comments and threads can be inane or simply goofy, there is often a great deal of critique and response posted online. David, for example, said he was a frequent reader of the Buffy The Vampire Slayer newsgroup. "I like to hear what new episode is about to come out or what new twist they'll throw in. I like to read people's comments and criticisms about the show. That helps me understand and enjoy it more," he said. Karen said she occasionally read The X-Files newsgroup to "get a chance to see what other people think is going on with the show." Though not all students are aware of or take part in these online discussions (which, as Karen noted, can be dominated by the more ardent fans, "Some of the people were *really* into it, sort of like Nineties Trekkies.") they seem to be gaining in popularity. Here then, is a forum of discussion, interpretation, and often critical rhetorical work going on about television, in writing no less. And though the quality of the threads does vary wildly, it does sometimes include analysis and response to that analysis in way that is generally not experienced in face-to-face discussions of television. During the last year I have spoken with many teachers of first-year composition, both formally and informally, about this project. In those many conversations, only a handful of them were even aware of the existence of such newsgroups, let alone the kind of discussions that their students might be involved in on them.

When I asked these students to talk about their conversations about reading or writing, all but two said they didn't talk about what they read except in the classroom and they didn't talk about writing except to ask friends for help with a specific assignment. They characterized classroom discussions about reading as significantly different than their conversations with friends about television. "If you're going to talk about something you read in class you have to look deep into it. You can't just talk about what you know happened in the story or what you saw, you have to do this deep analysis," Irene said. In part these students identified this difference as the expectation of what they felt they were supposed to "get" from a work. They understood assigned readings as part of the teacher's

pedagogical agenda and talked about reading with an awareness of trying to fulfill that agenda, while they talked of watching television for relaxation or enjoyment. In part students also understood that class discussions were evaluative situations in a way that discussions with friends were not. As Karen put it:

> People want to appear intelligent in class, so they try to say intelligent things, things that apply. I'm sure they think about those things before they say them. I just don't randomly think of things and say them in class. And I don't think I would be as careful and as in-depth with a television show, unless it really moved me.

Certainly as teachers many of us want our students to want to appear intelligent and to think about their comments before making them. Yet, in class discussions, students often seem more focused on interpretation and emotional response and more puzzled or resistant to analysis. What is more important here is to recognize both the extensiveness and range of quality of conversations that take place about television. Because students do less talking about what they read, be if for emotional reinforcement, interpretation, or analysis, they may be much less practiced in the kind of discourse we seek in a classroom than we expect them to be. Consequently they may bring to class discussions the kind of comments that they practice more often in their discussions of the texts they engage with most frequently -- television programs. Understanding the nature and purpose of student conversations about television offers us as teachers a different lens through which to view their comments about first-year composition reading and writing assignments. This understanding, in turn, may open up potential ways of both bridging and distinguishing the kinds of discourse we are seeking in our classrooms and the kinds of discourse that revolve around television.

"It's Not a Conscious Part. It's Just There."

"I think that it (television) has to influence our writing because we could go into Russia and that would influence your writing. Anything you do influences your thoughts which influences your writing," Courtney, nursing major.

When I asked students whether they thought their television viewing influenced their writing or reading most of them quickly said yes with a certainty, as illustrated by Courtney's comment, that would warm the heart of any social constructivist. All but three of the students said that they thought it was inevitable that television would influence their writing and reading. None of them could articulate what the influence might be. Kevin put it this way:

> It probably does, but I couldn't know it because there is no standard to compare myself to. There is nobody who grew up in a vacuum without TV. Your writing comes from everything around you and what you think comes from what you've seen. Television is, I'm sure, a part of that. But it's not a conscious part. It's just there.

In many ways the students I interviewed were more willing to acknowledge the potential influence of television on their writing than most of the writing teachers I either interviewed or spoke with informally. Some of the students agreed that though television was probably influential, it was an influence that had not been discussed in their writing courses. Bruce said, "Of course it has to be an influence on my writing. But that's not something you're going to hear in an English class. I mean, English teachers only talk about TV to tell you how much they hate it."

In part the inability to explain the connection between television and writing and reading may be traceable to the students' general unawareness of rhetorical concepts or vocabulary. Although these students, when asked, could describe different rhetorical elements of television programs such as form or audience, I don't believe they would have generated such a discussion without my direct questions. Often, after we had talked about form or genre or audience or style in terms of television programs, the students would comment that they had not thought about television in such a way before. And not only did they have a more difficult time describing such rhetorical concepts in their writing or reading, they also said that they had not really thought about writing or reading in such a way before, or several said they had only begun to in their first-year composition course.

Consequently, when I asked them if there were similarities between television and reading or television and writing their responses focused primarily on the similarities in their practices and the emotional responses to the works. As Courtney said, "There are similarities because it makes you go somewhere else and it can make you not think about what's going on in your head or it can make you bring things out you weren't sure about." Courtney's comment also was indicative of most of the responses students made to this line of questioning in that it focused on both the narrative and imaginative forms of print and television. David said, "It (television) doesn't leave as much to the imagination, but it sort of lets you enjoy it a little bit more. Whereas, if you're reading a book, you're into it, but you also have to use your imagination to draw on experiences to know what an object is."

David's comment illustrates one of the two primary differences students noted between television and reading and writing: the presence or absence of the image. As David added, "Being able to see something is definitely a very good experience because you see what it is." Or, as Julie characterized reading, "It's like a movie but you have to make your own pictures in your mind." The difference between print and the visual medium of television was the one formal distinction students recognized. The students often talked about the "stories" on television and in print as potentially being identical, but what distinguished the two from each other were the images on television and how those images made the experience of watching television easier. "A book makes you create your own world, while TV creates it for you," Irene said. "But you have to be in the right mood to create your own world. If you feel like getting into something but don't want to have to work to create your own world, than TV is just the thing." While "reading" a story on television would be easier, it was also often defined as being less worthwhile. Irene added that she would "expect more out of a book than TV." Karen said that "television is just a lot easier than reading or writing. There's just a lot less thinking involved." And Kevin said that the visual nature of television made it closed to the kind of variable interpretation

available with print texts. "With reading you have to think up the picture in your head, so it's much more open to interpretation. TV is just what it is. There's no interpretation," he said.

Peter was the only student to make a direct formal connection between television and writing in the culture at large. "Seems like you can tell TV's influence in a lot of the writing you read from the past. Like from more than 30 years ago or from someone older." He compared the work of Leon Uris, his favorite author, who Peter felt excelled at character development in his novels, with the novel A Simple Plan that Peter read during the holiday break. "A Simple Plan was terrible. It was written like the outline to a television show. It didn't take the time to get involved in the characters...It was just there for you. Shallow. No depth there to get into. The only difference is that you are reading it." Peter was the single student to pay particular attention to the aspect of language and writing on television. That he had read broadly as a child, and continued to read broadly, no doubt contributed to his focus on writing. That he had not had a television in his home until he was twelve no doubt meant that he spent more time reading than watching television. Certainly now that he watched five hours of television a day in college had not dulled his critical capacity to discuss form and style on both television and in print. As with any form of discourse, an ability to engage in it fluently and critically comes with experience. Peter had extensive experience with both print and television texts and had talked about both in rhetorical terms in high school classes. He moved between the two media easily and perceptively in his comments.

When considering Peter's experience it may be tempting to look for a chicken-and-egg kind of causality between print and television literacy. Do students understand rhetorical forms on television because they learned them first through print? Or is it the other way around? Does Peter read television through a print lens while Kevin reads print through a television lens? Such questions are in the end reductive and self defeating. It is impossible to unravel precisely which literacy comes first. Just as it is impossible to say

with certainty that students' understandings of form and narrative are influenced primarily by television or by popular novels such as Stephen King. What is possible is to recognize the depth of experience students have with television and how that provides them both with more texts to draw on, as well as a greater sense of authority, in their discussions. It is also possible, as I illustrate above and in Chapter Four, that these students could demonstrate reading and interpretive skills with television that were superior to their skills with print. Did print literacy or television literacy come first? As with the chicken and the egg, I don't know. What I do know, however, is, once you have the chickens and the eggs, if you spend most of your time cooking and eating one rather than the other, you become a more sophisticated and discerning connoisseur of what kind of meals are possible with eggs, and less so with chickens.

Most of the students I talked with, however, had neither the experience with reading or writing nor the background in rhetorical analysis to engage in the same level of discussion as Peter. What most of them did have was the same experience and critical discursive skills concerning television. If, in a writing course, one of our goals is to provide students with a richer experience of print literacy and set of critical rhetorical skills, would we not benefit from knowing that there was a realm in which students could talk confidently and in depth about concepts of form and audience and even the critical edge that propels irony? Would it not be easier for students to grasp these rhetorical concepts in the less familiar print texts we want them to read and write if we could illustrate how they already read texts using such concepts in a different discursive medium? The students I talked with possessed critical reading and interpretive skills that they used when watching television, skills that were going unrecognized and unvalued in the academy. I am not arguing that these skills are automatically transferable to the skills needed to read and write critically and analytically in a first-year writing course. Indeed, the differences could be as instructive in a classroom as the similarities. I am contending, however, that if we acknowledge and explore with our students the nature and quality of

their skills involved in watching television, we may find heretofore hidden paths to the skills of print literacy that will enrich the print *and* television literacies of our students and ourselves. I will discuss in Chapter Five what the implications of such an approach might be in a first-year composition program and classroom.

If teaching writing were as simple as trading or transmitting one set of rhetorical skills on television for others valued in the classroom, however, there is no doubt that more of it would be happening. This chapter has focused on the rhetorical skills students could demonstrate about their television watching. Toward that end it has focused what students could overtly articulate about how they watched television. Yet there are other more subtle but just as significant cultural influences formed from extensive experiences with television that also have an effect on how students respond to writing and reading in a first-year composition course. These influences often differ fundamentally from how we as teachers perceive and structure our classroom culture, yet we may be as oblivious to them as our students. This chapter has been about what our students understand and perceive as influential about television; the next chapter is about what may be just as powerful, but not as readily visible to them or us.

[1]I have used psuedonyms for the students I quote in this project.

[2]A general list of the questions I asked students can be found in Appendix A.

[3]Given the relatively homogenous cultural composition of the students involved in the project I am aware that there are limitations to the conclusions I can draw from these interviews. I hope in the future to do further cross-cultural work and work with non-traditional students on this subject.

[4]I am unsure as to whether the fact that no students decided to respond to the work reflects their satisfaction with what I have written, or a sense that they lack the authority or the confidence in their writing to criticize the work. This lack of response strikes me as a failure of mine in terms of this project.

[5]Although television is often criticized as getting in the way of academic work, several studies indicate that time spent watching television does not seem to influence homework or achievement until the watching rises above twenty-five hours a week (Neuman 135).

[6] Although the conventional wisdom is to expect men to be more prone to zapping through channels than women, both men and women students reported engaging in the practice. The men did talk more about the practice and may, perhaps, spend more time zapping when watching television in part because the men in this study also were more likely to spend more of their television watching time alone, while women reported more often watching as social experiences. Both men and women students reported zapping as a practice they engaged in while watching alone, a response that should not surprise anyone who has had to sit through someone else incessantly flipping through the channels. Indeed, several students mentioned how much they disliked having someone else do the zapping. I discuss remote control use further in Chapter Three.

[7]That more than half the students mentioned these programs is certainly not a coincidence and instead gives a sense of the popularity of partcular programs with most of the students I interviewed. Students commonly talked about watching programs such as The Simpsons, Friends, The X-Files, Southpark, ER, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Beverley Hills 90210, and documentaries on TLC, Discovery, The History Channel, and A&E. About half of the students said that they occasionally watched television news programs. Documentaries, The X-Files, Buffy, and 90210 were programs that transcended gender lines. Women generally mentioned Friends, ER, daytime talkshows such as Oprah and Jerry Springer. Men mentioned The Simpsons, Southpark, and watching sports on television. Of course a wide variety of other programs were mentioned by individual students. One interesting point about these viewing habits is that, with the exception of Friends and ER, none of the shows students mentioned were products of the traditional "Big Three" networks -- ABC, CBS, or NBC.

[8]These experiences with reading and writing are quite similar to the ones students in my writing courses express when I have them write "literacy narratives" during the first week of class. Even in a setting where you might imagine students would want to impress me with their love of writing and reading, many instead write stories of boredom, anxiety, and pain concerning how they were taught in junior high and high school English courses. My use of literacy narratives and my insights concerning the stories students tell stem directly from the research of Stephanie Paterson and I am deeply indebted to her for her ideas and insights.

[9]In his comments is was clear that Etienne saw this program as representing mainstream political debate, rather than intended as essentially ironic and comic.

[10]As I will illustrate in Chapter Four, they are equally adept at analyzing different intended audiences in a string of advertisements.

[11]One notable exception to this was Peter who said, "I'm pretty critical when I watch TV. If I'm watching a show I'll kind of pick it apart. 'Well, they could have put something in here or done something differently there' and so on."

CHAPTER III

SWITCHING CHANNELS: TIME, AUTHORITY, AND AUTHORSHIP ON TELEVISION AND IN WRITING

Take a look at your watch. How long do you think it will take you to read this chapter? Not sure? Will it depend on the page length, the kind of writing, your purpose in reading it, your level of interest, whether you have read it before? As those variables change, so will the time you would spend on this chapter.

If the information in this chapter were being presented in a television program, however, you would know how much time you would have to spend with it. Even if you turned on a television program in the U.S. without a schedule handy, you might be able to make an educated guess as to how much longer the program would last based on the genre of the program, the kind of action happening when you tuned in, how many minutes it would be until the hour or half hour, and so on. You would be able to guess, whether what you were watching was comprehensible or not, how much longer you would have until the next program came along. The number of pages in the script of the program would be irrelevant to your experience.

As I noted in Chapter One, printed texts are defined not by time, but by space in the number of column inches or pages a piece of printed text occupies.[1] In the same way that an experienced television viewer could sense how much of a show was left based on a knowledge of programming and genre conventions, an experienced reader could look at an essay, article or novel and have same sense of how much of the text is left based on a knowledge of genre, what was happening in the text at that point, and the page number.

This distinction between television as a medium constrained by time and print as a medium constrained by space may seem obvious. It may also seem obvious, and more than

a bit of a cliché, to say that we and our students live in a world where the speed of information delivery and our processing of that information seems to increase on an almost daily basis. Yet these two ideas about time and speed, and the ways in which they are constantly promoted and reinforced through the ubiquitous medium of television, influence the ways in which our students perceive the production and reception of information. Such perceptions, in turn, have a significant influence on how our students respond to ideas of writing and reading, particularly in a first-year composition course.

In this chapter I will look at the ways in which television influences our larger cultural assumptions about the delivery and reception of information and ways in which these assumptions are often in conflict with the assumptions in first-year writing courses. Though the students I interviewed often articulate the effects of these assumptions, they seem less aware of the basis of the assumptions themselves; and very often we, as their teachers, are similarly unaware or unreflective about these assumptions. I will focus on three of the more significant points of conflict.

First I will examine at how students' broad experience with television as a medium defined by time and privileging speed influences the ways they prefer information to be delivered and the ways in which they respond having to work with printed texts both as writers and readers.

Also I will discuss how television positions viewers, including our students, as members of the "audience" and how that influences their view of authorship and their view of what is authoritative or "real". Underlying all of these elements is the visual nature of how information is received from television.

Finally, I will discuss how students perceive the purpose of communication on television and the emphasis on action, surfaces, emotion and pleasure, irony, and distraction. This is often in contrast with the purpose of communication in a writing classroom that emphasizes reflection, depth, rationality and detachment, analysis, and close reading. Though these simplistic binaries are often more permeable than the list

above would indicate, they nonetheless point to distinctions that are constructed by both students and their teachers in writing courses and, as such, create conflict and resistance.

Wasting Your Time

Time to check your watch again. How much time has passed since you began reading this chapter? Does it matter? Probably not. Although we occasionally face deadlines in our reading or writing -- an article has to be in the mail by tomorrow or we need to finish reading an essay before class -- more often than not, we don't structure our reading tasks around time. If I have an hour I may sit down to read a chapter of a book; but if I haven't finished the chapter before I have to pick up my children from school I know I can come back to it later.

When watching television, however, our relationship with time is quite different. Time is central to way that television is structured, created, and received. As Patricia Mellencamp puts it: "US network television is a disciplinary time machine, a metronome rigorously apportioning the present, rerunning TV history, and anxiously awaiting the future" (240). Television networks and programmers divide programs into time slots in order to have a measurable unit by which to sell advertising. Television producers create programs that will fit within these marketing structures of time. These blocks of marketable time require narratives that are normally resolved within that time-frame and consequently create an audience expectation for just such a resolution (Brummett 14).[2] As members of the audience, we often organize our engagement with television around these segments of time. In our conversations about television we organize our thinking around the amount of time we spend watching programs. Television is a "waste of time" or a way to "kill some time" or a way to "spend some free time." The American Academy of Pediatrics report on television viewing encouraged limiting the number of hours young children watch, not the specific kinds of programs. Surveys of viewing habits report average hours watched per week or per day. My questions to students about how much

television they watched per week were also framed in hours, not individual programs. The students were familiar enough with this way of thinking of television to always be able to answer the question without hesitation. If I asked them how many programs they watched, it took them longer to reflect and construct an answer.

The reason time is so central to our experience of television has once again to do with the nature of television "flow". Though television viewers, including the students in this project, may tune in to watch a particular program, the experience of watching is often not confined to that program alone. The program itself will be interrupted by advertisements, and organized around such interruptions. Also it is not unusual for a television to be switched on well before the program comes on and to be left on afterward. Courtney, as just one example, said, "I can sit down to watch one show and then, before I shut it off, I realize I've been watching for four hours." Indeed, television programmers work not with an eye toward the program as an individual text, but attempt to hook viewers in to the flow. As Robert C. Allen argues, "Because the goal of commercial television is the stimulation of habitual viewing over long periods, programs are conceived of more as waves in the schedule's never-ending flow than as books on a shelf" (133). On many occasions, however, students reported turning on the television without a specific program in mind, just to zap around and kill time. This may be joining the televised flow in its purest form. In such situations, trying to define television viewing by discrete programs is useless given how easy it is to watch several hours of television, remote control in hand, without seeing a single program in its entirety.

Conversations about print, on the other hand, revolve around the number of books or the number of pages we have read or plan to read. When my children took part in the city library's summer reading program, progress was measured in the number of books read, not the hours spent reading them. When I give my students reading or writing assignments I usually define them by the specific work or by a number of pages; rarely do I ask them to read for two hours.

One result of this difference between time as the way we organize and experience television viewing and space as the way we experience print, is that many students, who have much greater experience with television than reading, find the temporal organization of television more comfortable. As Sarah Kozloff points out, "Unlike oral, literary, or cinematic narratives, which are much more likely to last as long as their story requires, television narratives have to fit into an assigned Procrustean bed" (90). The open-ended temporal nature of reading, by contrast, is less familiar and provokes a mild anxiety that some of the students I talked with cite as one reason they don't read outside of their course assignments. Kevin, for example, who said that the television in his apartment is on five to six hours a day, said he was willing to turn to his magazines when what was on the television was not particularly engaging, but that he was not likely to turn off the television in order to read a book. He said:

> I don't read that many books. It's a huge amount of time to put into something to read 600-700 pages of something. So I never do. I hate starting stuff and not finishing it. Like the last book I read. I started it and I got like halfway through and it stopped being very good, it was a thriller, but I felt like I had to finish it. But it took so much time.

Kevin and other students frequently said that the time it would take to read a book or even an article or short story or the newspaper impeded their desire to read[3] -- though they did not explicitly say that the temporal constraints on television programs appealed to them, their comments about form in the previous chapter and the knowledge that programs would often resolve at least some storylines by a certain set time, illustrate their comfort with that structure. Part of the allure of television and film is that, regardless of how comprehensible a program is, it will be over by a certain time. Yet a difficult piece of reading might take much longer to read even once. Students, like many others in society, are faced with competing demands on their time including jobs, clubs, teams, classes, falling in and out of love, and so on. This hurried world of multiple responsibilities gives

finite temporal texts such as television programs an additional allure. As David Marc notes in comparing the investment of time reading with watching television or film:

> Even if it is as difficult a visual text as, say, Luis Bunuel's The Milky Way, you could still run it through the VCR, stay in the room, and believe you've "seen" it. While watching the videotape it would be possible to eat, drink, smoke, take notes with both hands, and get up and walk around without "losing" any time (33).

This helps explain part of the allure of film and popular culture courses for some students. The investment of time seems finite and not as demanding as book-oriented courses. As resistant as some of my students can be about re-reading print texts, students I have taught in film classes are both astonished and annoyed when I give them the news that they will be expected to watch each assigned film more than once.

What was particularly intriguing in comments from students I interviewed about reading and writing and time, was the anxiety that they might waste their time reading something that might not ultimately be worth reading, time they could have spent doing something more fulfilling. Joe said the "worst thing" about reading was the time it took. "If it takes you four hours to read something and if it takes someone else three hours, I don't have that hour to waste." Or as Karen put it, "I really like to read, but I don't do it a lot. I think of the amount of time it takes and that I can't know how long it will take me to read something. When I do have free time it's not necessarily time I'm going to spend reading." And Irene said that she "stopped reading and writing when I had too much work to do. I'm one of those people who needs time by myself to just sit there and be myself and not have to do anything. And that is more important than writing."

In all of these students' comments, comments that are representative of ones made by almost all the students I interviewed including those who considered themselves frequent readers and writers, reading and writing beyond class assignments was constructed as an activity they would not normally choose because of the uncertainty of how much time it might require, how they would fit that time into their schedule, and whether it would be time well spent. A number of the students talked about using

television as a way to "kill time" between classes or a way to relax and "waste some time" after a stressful day, none of them talked of reading or writing in the same way. Reading and writing were talked about as requiring concentration, hard work, and a substantial investment of effort and time that might or might not result in a fulfilling experience. As Peter said, "I think most people that tend to do a lot of reading and writing don't tend to watch a lot of TV. If you're reading books that takes up the free time you could be watching TV in. Everybody watches some TV." Once again, television is perceived as a pleasurable experience, while reading and writing are perceived as worthy experiences often lacking in pleasure.

I would reject the conclusion some might reach that the student comments above somehow indicate that these students belong to a generation that can't read complicated texts because watching television has dulled their minds. I would also note that research indicates for most young people time spent watching television has not replaced leisure reading of literary works, but instead replaced the use of other media such as radio, moviegoing, and pulp fiction and comic books (Neuman 29) in the similar way that computer games for some students are replacing television watching. Instead I believe it indicates a lack of experience, and therefore an unfamiliarity, with the forms of reading that have cultural capital in the academy. This unfamiliarity makes it more difficult for these less experienced readers to make the confident judgments about their reading that they do about their television. If I begin reading an article or essay or novel I feel confident that I can evaluate its quality at any number of points in the text. If the work is so weak or unappealing that it does not serve my purposes, I do not necessarily feel compelled to finish it. I move on to another work. In a similar way, the students I talked with were capable both of judging what was worth watching on television, and then willing to make the decision to switch off the set or change the channel if they found a program wanting. (This is a skill I feel I share with them.) Yet they expressed less confidence in both evaluating printed texts, most specifically ones they considered the

property of high culture and the academy, and less willing to leave a printed text partially read without feeling some sense of failure and guilt. If they switched off a television program, that was OK, because it was only escapist entertainment anyway. This helps explain the seeming paradox that students find comfort in the temporal constraints of television, but will also zap among the channels to a degree that they may not see an entire program. Not only are they well acquainted with the experience of television as flow -- and are able to create their own flow through zapping -- they have enough experience with the forms of television programs from having seen entire shows time and again that they don't feel the need to see the whole shows in order to judge whether they want to watch it, how much time it will take, and whether it is worth their time. At the same time, they share the cultural construction that television is a mindless wasteland, so that turning off a program does not imply failure, but rather good taste.

To stop reading, however, because they found a piece to be incomprehensible or unfulfilling, even if it was reading they chose to do on their own, made them feel less intelligent, guilty, and resentful. They often initially cloaked these feelings in comments focused on resistance. Andrew, for example, said that he was wary of picking up new books to read because, "If it doesn't interest me, I won't read it. I won't force myself to read it." Similarly, Courtney said, "I don't want to ever feel pressured to read something new. If I don't want to read it and hate it I won't read it." Yet further conversation often revealed the underlying insecurity they felt when confronting print texts. As Joe put it, "I frankly don't read that many books or things because unless I know specifically what it's about, I don't like to read three or four chapters or seventy-five pages to try to get my brain going and involved in the subject, only to find that I didn't like it anyway. I feel like an idiot then because I didn't figure out sooner that I was wasting my time." Jennifer said, "When you get assigned something to read that is way over your head it can make you want to give up on it because nobody likes to feel like they're stupid." This difference in security between how many college teachers view their reading of print texts and how

their students view such reading can create an enormous gap in the writing classroom. And when students do find material they feel confident reading, they express the same kind of authority and willingness to judge a work, that they do about television. Several students talked about how, when reading books they did like or had chosen themselves, they would lose themselves in the story and lose track of the time that had passed.

Part of our job as writing teachers, then, must be to make students aware that their struggles with reading some of the print texts we assign comes in part from unfamiliarity and lack of experience rather than the cognitive impairments that have resulted from years of watching television. We need to see beyond their comments of resistance to recognize the underlying source of anxiety that many students feel when confronting the printed texts we assign them to read and write. We can also help them recognize that their sophisticated ability to read television texts is a kind of critical reading that has emerged from experience and conversation with others about those experiences. At the same time we need to help students understand that these experiences with television texts have accustomed them to a kind of reading and kinds of forms that may not be directly transferable to writing and reading in a composition course. The emphasis in television on emotion, on plot, on the visual -- as I will discuss in Chapter Four -- as well as the need for popular response are ways in which television texts are quite different from print.

Still, if students are more aware of how they have learned to read television texts, and to understand that they had to learn how to read those texts to read them now with the level of critical sophistication they consistently demonstrate, they can recognize that they may be able to read and write with the same level of comfort and pleasure if they increase their experiences and conversation about print texts. At the very least we can reduce some of their anxiety about their abilities to read print texts. Obviously this is not as simplistic a solution as it sounds; I will outline in more detail what I actually do in classes in Chapter Five. And, just as obviously, not all students will respond to this approach. Yet with experience comes confidence and with confidence comes further

engagement and experience. The students I teach recognize this process in other areas of their lives, from sports to hobbies to music and so on. What they often do not recognize is that they have reading experience and rhetorical skills from a communication medium that can be useful to them in negotiating the unfamiliar terrain of the communication demanded in a college writing classroom. If we take the time to talk with them about these skills, about the differences in how they are constructed in time and space, we can find them more willing to explore the unfamiliar in writing and reading, gain experience, and become more willing and sophisticated writers.

Of course television competes for students' time with other technologies as well as print. And it has become fashionable to talk more about computer technology and its effect on students and their writing than to talk about television. Not only are computers gaining in cultural capital in the academy, but, given the rapidity of growth and change in the technology and its uses it makes it an exiting and fluid form that educators might actually still be able to shape to their uses. Certainly the students I talked to were familiar with computers -- two were computer science majors -- and a few spent a great deal of time on-line, though most said that they used their computers primarily for emailing friends and family. Yet before we assume that students are spending all of their time on line, it is worth noting that the students I interviewed, with one exception, reported spending more time watching television than doing any kind of computer work including emailing, Web surfing, game playing, or writing. Such ratios may change in years to come, though it is again worth noting that the Kaiser study found that eight to eighteen year olds spent almost as much time watching television as they did engaging with all other media, including books, radio, computers, video games, and the Internet (Kaiser). We are still a country where 96 percent of American households have televisions and less than half have personal computers of any kind.

It is also television that has the most distinctive power among communication media to influence how we establish our daily and weekly routines. Because of the

repetition of the schedule, television programming can be easily incorporated into a daily or weekly routine. If a program is on the same time every day or every week, and it is a program the viewer has grown fond of, then other more flexible events in the viewer's life often get rearranged so that the program can be seen at the appropriate time.[4] When I asked about his childhood viewing habits, Joe could still repeat in detail his weekly viewing schedule when he was in junior high school:

> MacGyver would be one of them on Monday nights. Who's the Boss? would run on Tuesday nights. Wednesday night they'd show Growing Pains. At that time it was the beginning of The Simpson's, so I'd watch that on Thursday. And TGIF would have just about been starting up right around then. So Family Matters on Friday nights, Step by Step and the others.

As I noted at the beginning of Chapter Two, some students continue to schedule their weeks around certain programs as Julie illustrated when she said, "Tonight is the night for Buffy and Felicity. Then I'll watch Dawson's Creek tomorrow and then I like to watch Friends (on Thursday)." In fact the influence of television on the scheduling of personal and family time crosses cultural boundaries and differing cultural orientations toward time so that "mealtimes, bedtimes, sharetime, periods for doing homework...and patterns of verbal interaction are influenced by the scheduling of TV shows" (Lull qtd in Morley 262). Even our longer conceptions of time are influenced by television in the recognition of autumn not only as the harvest or the beginning of the school year but as the start of the new television season after the summer re-run season. Savvy viewers, including some of our students are equally aware that November, February, and May are "sweeps months" when networks program their best shows in order to set their advertising rates. This, of course, uncovers the extent to which the scheduling of television absorbs viewers into the rhythms of consumer culture. The viewers' time in front of their television sets is what programmers are selling to advertisers and scheduling makes certain that the viewers will be in their seats, with the sets on, week after week.

The difference between the way students schedule their time around television viewing and the way they use their time to read and write is that most students do not have set times for reading and writing. More interesting is the way students regard reading and writing as activities that *cannot* be scheduled, but must happen in spontaneous moments of inspiration. More than half of the students I spoke with described reading as something that had to happen when they were in the mood. Julie said, "I have to be in the mood to read. It has to be quiet and I have to be really ready to be into it." Even more of the students talked about writing needing to happen spontaneously. As David put it, "I can't plan when I need to write. It has to happen when I'm inspired and I can just let my thoughts and feelings go into it. You can't schedule creativity." (The paradox in these comments, of course, is that time for the spontaneous creativity of writing and reading must decrease in the face of a full schedule of television programs to be watched.) This vision of writing won't surprise anyone who has taught writing. Clearly such a popular conception of writing has its roots in the Romantic conception of the author as artist, a still-powerful vision of writing in our culture. This Romantic vision of the artist is also one that, as popular myth, views the artist as withstanding the pressure of commodification and creating art to fulfill a personal vision of beauty or truth. Again, the philosophical foundation of literature and rhetoric as vehicles for the pursuit of truth and beauty, runs into the popular foundation of television as a vehicle for commerce. What is also intriguing in the comparison with television is the contrast in students' perceptions between television which is mindless but must be scheduled and the mythology of reading and writing which are thoughtful but cannot be scheduled.

It is also useful to realize that the nature of television scheduling is different than reading or writing in the way that the scheduling becomes another aspect of narrative alongside "story" and "discourse". The latter are influenced by their placement within the larger context of the station's schedule (Kozloff 69). This gives the viewer a sense of what kind of programming is more likely to occur at a different time of day -- children's

programs in the early morning, soap operas at mid-day, irreverent comedy later at night. This scheduling structure adds a layer of predictability to much of what is programmed on television. A viewer can look at the clock, pick up the zapper, and turn on the television with a general idea of what the choices might be. For a reader, walking through a bookstore, seeing the different covers on books in the Romance, Science Fiction, Poetry, and Psychology sections might serve some of the same functions. Yet students in a first-year composition course assigned an essay in an anthology rarely receive any such cues as to the nature of the work they are about to read. The essay is reprinted to look like all the other works in the anthology. There may a brief biographical introduction to the author listing titles of publications or the magazine where the work was first published; but to the inexperienced reader these titles and names of magazines may be meaningless. Rarely are there any visual cues to help the students put the essay in a familiar cultural context.

The other effect of scheduling on narrative is the repetitive nature of television series. As I discussed in Chapter One, the television series requires a narrative in which the central problematic is never resolved, but in which each week's conflict is resolved. This provides a structure of familiarity for the viewer. Each week's episode must both stand on its on and yet connect with the other's, often explicitly harkening backwards or forwards in time -- "Last week on NYPD Blue" or "Next week on The X-Files." Kevin said that, "A series can change over the years, and your thoughts about a series can change too." Although there are differences, as I noted in Chapter One, between a television series and a discrete work such as a novel or film, there is an intriguing similarity between the way many writing teachers approach teaching a writing process and way television series work for viewers. Both emphasize an open-ended nature that forestalls quick resolution. In a television series viewers are asked to return next week to see what happens. In a writing process students are asked to return to their writing to see what else might be changed or added to their work. As with a number of the connections between television and writing,

I believe there is a metaphor available here that can be useful in a writing classroom. I will discuss the uses of similar metaphors more fully in Chapter Five.

On the other hand, the nature of series television can mean that the same characters are presented in the same place each week, but that they exist without a sense of history. Each episode of a series may repeat certain situations, scenes, or even lines, but there is often little sense of the accumulation of experiences or memories in the way that would happen to real people. Instead the characters are doomed to re-enact, each week, the conflicts that propel their series, often seeming to have learned nothing from the events of the week before (Joyrich 238). The duration of viewing time is the essential sense of time in television. "The work of time itself as decay is seldom represented in images of the human body or everyday life. Nor is the past so much remembered via narrative as it is rerun or embedded as archival images within contemporary, discursive presentation" (Morse 109-110). Again, as Grossberg notes, television is only concerned with its own history, in relation to itself (133) as we see in the self-referential quality of an entire channel such as Nick at Nite's TV Land, devoted to the rerunning of television history as current programming.

Print texts, on the other hand, are rarely so self-referential and are still situated in most English Departments in terms of historical time. Thus courses are still offered such as "Contemporary American Fiction, 1945-Present" or job postings ask for specialists in "Eighteenth Century British Literature." Print, including literature, in college courses is usually regarded as a method of representing lived experiences to others. We can read Jane Austen to gain a sense of Eighteenth Century manners in English country homes. Even works such as James Joyce's Ulysses or Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children, with their elements of the fantastic, are meant to situate us as readers in a specific historical moment outside of the text. Television programs, on the other hand, exist in the present tense. Though viewing a rerun of I Love Lucy may give us an image of clothing and furnishings from the Fifties, unless we are media critics we don't expect it to offer us

insights into the political or cultural world outside of the series at that time. It is simply a sitcom be broadcast at the same time as other sitcoms. This perpetual present also helps explain why reruns of conventional sitcoms and dramas are so popular on television, but why programs based on topical humor, such as Saturday Night Live, or current events documentaries or talk shows seem oddly out of place when they are repeated. Also because television creates and continually draws upon its own history and reality, it requires no elite knowledge for participation (Grossberg 132-133). Again, this can be contrasted with readings in a composition or literature course which often require knowledge of history of current events to be understood; and if students don't have that knowledge as teachers encourage them to get it quickly, to "look it up," or to do a more formal research project that includes such background knowledge.

This also helps explain television's emphasis on "liveness". Unlike print or cinema, television has the capacity to present images to us as they are happening somewhere else. It is its great allure in terms of the news and sporting events. That is what television can sell about such programming, its sense of seeing it as it happens. Even when it isn't broadcasting "live", there is always the impression that it could be. Consequently the point is made that sitcoms were taped before "a live studio audience" and the Classic Sports channel exists by rerunning tapes of sporting events as if they were being broadcast "live." Though we know that most of what we see on television has been taped, edited, and then broadcast, the allure of "liveness" is such that it was the original selling point for a show such as Saturday Night Live on which it was emphasized anything could happen. The series ER made a similar splash by broadcasting one of its episodes "live". This capacity and emphasis on liveness is appealing to the students I spoke with and they see it as part of what provides television with its authority when compared with print, as I will discuss later in this chapter.

Speed Without Limits

The emphasis on liveness has translated into an emphasis on speed as well -- speed in the delivery of information and the speed in which the information is communicated. Though increasing speed of delivery and communication is not new with television, radio and film both offered increases in the speed of delivery and communication -- even the printing press could deliver more information faster than hand-copying manuscripts -- television has been particularly adept and focused on increasing the speed of delivery and communication of information. One can read faster or slower, but one cannot speed up the words on the page or even on the computer screen. Most of us read at our own pace, in private, deciding when to speed up or slow down or even stop. The producers of television programs and advertisements, however, can increase the speed at which that information is communicated and, as viewers, we either have to keep up or get left behind.

In part it is the visual and public nature of television that allows for this potential to increase the amount of information being communicated at any one time. As Gunther Kress has pointed out, humans are capable of reading multiple images quickly and simultaneously, and uses an example such as the instrument panel on an airplane flight deck as one place where images are preferred over words because of how quickly pilots can read and interpret the basic information they provide (56). As in the example of the newscaster reporting on an airplane crash, we can instantly see and interpret both the newscaster sitting at a desk and the map projected behind her head showing the location of the accident. As a culture we have also become more adept at quickly processing images on the screen. Advertising, music videos, and other forms of television that use rapidly shifting images filled with information have become increasingly common, in part, because we as viewers have learned how to keep up with them, how to process the images quickly and coherently. This means that those who make television programs and advertisements, and film as well, can increase the amount of information they pack into a given amount of time. At NBC, for example, technicians have eliminated the "blacks" in

programming, the moment when a show fades to black and goes to a commercial. This saves the network fifteen to twenty seconds a night. At the same time the network began running the end titles of programs down the side of the screen while running programming or promotional material in the other two thirds to keep viewers from zapping away at the end of a show (Gleick 54-57). According to John Miller, an executive vice president at NBC, "Every station looks at every second of air time and uses it to the best of its ability...Everybody looks at their time with a microscope to get the best utilization they can. It's the only real estate we have" (qtd in Gleick 57).

The proliferation of cable channels and remote control devices have intensified the need for television programmers to keep the information coming quickly and relentlessly. Any lull in the action might cause a viewer to zap away from a program, never to return. As Andrew said, "If a show slows down or gets boring, I'll zap away in a hurry." Indeed, boredom with a program comes up time and again in studies of remote control use as one of the primary reasons viewers decide to zap, rivaled only by the desire to see what one might be missing on other channels.[5] This ability of viewers to more easily disrupt the flow of televised programming than they could when it meant getting up and turning the channel has not gone unnoticed by networks and producers. Increasingly, shows begin with eye-catching, rapidly edited opening credits or just leap right into the action or the first joke without bothering to provide more than a quick flash of the title on the screen several minutes into the program when the first advertisements appear (Eastman and Neal-Lunsford 191). This, as Mitchell Stephens argues, has implications not only for the amount of information we are presented with when we turn on the television, but for how we process and think about that information:

> Half a minute, when filled with a few dozen images, gains depth and breadth. New artistic and philosophical spaces are opened up in time. Words, of course, create some substantial spaces of their own. They can grow scenes in our thoughts, but the new video, because it tends to swarm rather than queue up, can fill out thoughts with flurries of such scenes (226).

The students I watched television with, as I will discuss in the next chapter, are so accustomed to this rapid presentation of images that it seems completely unremarkable to them. They are easily able to read the video texts that may seem to go by so rapidly that they are literally slightly dizzying to those with less television viewing experience.

As members of our culture, then, we spend less time in concentrated attention on a particular rhetorical event, such as an hour-long speech by a single individual, and more time processing multiple images and pieces of information from multiple sources (Brummett xii). It means, as television viewers, that we have grown to expect the nature of the information we receive to be fast and shifting. As a culture we have grown less patient with long discourses on television and prefer images and language that are quick, engaging, to the point, and juxtaposed in quick edits against other ideas. Even on talk or panel programs, that don't engage in the same kind of editing practices, speed counts. The people who are asked to be on such programs are those who can think quickly and easily put those thoughts into smooth, coherent sentences.

Has such an emphasis on speed, both on the part of viewers and on the part of programmers, made the information the public receives through television more superficial, or has it provided more and varied information in multidimensional forms? I would have to say "Yes." And the effect of speed is something as writing teachers we need to take seriously in the classroom. I will be the first to admit that the speed of information available on television can be thrilling. To be able to swim in the rapid flood of images and words that come through television, and to make meaning from those images and words, is both a thrill and often useful. It is important that composition teachers recognize the utility of speed for certain kinds of information delivery, and the ability of the thrill of speed to grasp the viewer.

And this emphasis on speed has, in its own way, penetrated parts of higher education. Speed, the ability to do it faster, to read, write, and communicate more rapidly, leads to efficiency and greater productivity and that will be rewarded. Speed of writing,

speed of response, speed of collaboration is one of the forces that has driven the move toward computers in composition, according to those in the field. Having the works of Shakespeare on CD-ROM is better because it is more efficient (Tuman 5). Being on-line is better because you can converse with others in your field more quickly, learn about the field faster, avoid "conversation at a crawl" (Crump). Students are better off writing in a networked classroom because they get an immediate response to their posts (Hawisher and Moran 632). Print is an outdated medium because it takes too long to produce, distribute, consume, and comment upon. This makes it "hopelessly out of sync with the thinking mechanism and the organic potential it would have for rapid interaction if only there were a medium that could support the requisite rounds of feedback." (Harnad 44). The medium Harnad sees as the solution to this problem, obviously, is the networked computer. And it is a message we see reinforced on an almost daily basis in advertisements for computer software and telecommunications. To paraphrase the teenager sitting at his computer in a recent advertisement for a local cable firm, education is all about how fast you can get the information.

I agree that comprehension and interpretation of rapid communication technologies can be an important way of generating and sharing knowledge. At the same time, the ability to keep up with the speed of information, particularly on television, is something students have already learned. There remains a value, I believe, in reflection and contemplation. If we are entering a world where our students will be increasingly engaged in rapid forms of communication, be it television or networked computers, we not only need to work with them in reading and writing with the technology and in learning how to learn and communicate in the rapid world of electronic communication, but it is even more vital that we find strategies that help them learn how to step back from the swiftly flowing stream of information at their fingertips to contemplate and ponder. As Frank T. Boyle, in paraphrasing Jonathan Swift, points out, we should not confuse "knowledge, which is

always hard won, with information, which is, and was, easily collected by, if you will, the compact disk full" (618).

The students I talked with often spoke about "bad" television as being programs they found to be "boring." When I asked them further questions about their criteria for finding a program boring, speed was often a consideration. Irene said, "Sometimes if a program is just going so slowly, if nothing seems to be happening, then I want to reach for the clicker and start clicking. It just doesn't keep you on the edge of your seat." And Andrew said that "I like a show that really keeps going. If I watch 90210 Wednesday I think it goes by fast. You get caught up in the action and you seem to be sitting there for only twenty minutes and the show is over. Time goes by faster."

Because television rarely offers viewers any kind of intervals or pauses to break up the flow of programming, it can be difficult to turn off the set once we switch it on (Williams 88). At the same time, while we are watching this rapid flow of images, often jumping from one context to the next even if we aren't zapping around the channels, we are rarely given the time for reflection on what we have been watching. (This may be why as viewers we often enforce pauses by getting up to do a chore, to get food, to look over the newspaper.) The speed at which information is available on television does seem to have an influence on students who encounter lengthy and unfamiliar print texts in a first-year writing course. Unlike popular print that has tried to emulate the pithiness and speed of television, such as USA Today or People magazine, students often encounter texts in their writing classes that their instructors have chosen precisely *because* of the richness of their detail and complexity. The instructors may relish savoring the detail of these works in ways that their students cannot comprehend. Julie put it this way:

> TV is better (than reading) to a point. You don't have to wait. You don't have to skip over things that don't interest you. Like if it's a good part in the book and you want to know what happens and they're going into all of this description, you just want to skip over a whole bunch of paragraphs to find out what's going on. That's a good part about movies and television, they get straight to the point.

Julie's complaint about too much detail and description in print and the value of the directness of television was echoed by more than half of the students I spoke with. Joe said that the beginning of any piece he read was the most important criterion for him in deciding whether he would continue to read a work. "Content is important," he said. "But you have to sell me in the first five or six sentences." Comments like these help make clear why, when I ask students in classes what qualities constitute good reading, speed is invariably one of the responses. They will say that they wish they could read faster and get the point in one reading (a view of reading, by the way, that is reinforced by the SATs and other standardized tests). As in watching television, there seems to be a desire among these students to encounter the material once, get to the resolution of the material, and move on the next text.

Yet in many first-year writing courses, speed is rarely a highly prized quality. With the exception of freewriting, instructors instead are more likely to emphasize reflection, revision, and an open-ended writing process that values slow and thoughtful reading and writing. As Lynn Bloom points out, delayed gratification is one of the unspoken middle-class virtues on which most first-year composition courses are built (665). This is often a way of approaching writing that is a difficult transition for students to make. Peter said, "I don't like all of the ways we have to keep going back over our work. I don't like to do drafts of papers or anything...I'd just type everything out once and hand it in for a final grade." And David said that writing usually came easily to him: "It's not something I'll spend an hour and a half working on. Usually half an hour or so will do it. I'm not much into revising. I like to get my feelings down and them move on."

These are the kinds of comments that lead some critics to the conclusion that television has resulted in shorter attention spans for those, particularly students, who watch a great deal of television. Recent commentary about shrinking sound bites and news reports on news programs have seemed to provide further evidence of this phenomenon. Yet this seeming truism about television and shorter attention spans has not been

substantiated -- or disproved -- in the educational and psychological research on the question (Neuman 98). John Leonard points out that when, in the late 1950s, Ed Sullivan began including eighteen-minute segments of opera on his variety show his ratings began a distinct plunge that did not reverse itself until he trimmed the segments to four minutes. "We hear a lot about what television's done to the attention span of the American public. We never hear anything about what the attention span of the American public has done to television" (31).

At the same time critics worry over the brief attention spans of students who have been watching television, one of the most popular movies in history -- and particularly among high school and college students -- was the film Titanic. The film, which many of my students spoke of seeing multiple times, lasted almost three hours with a coherent, unfragmented, traditional narrative at its center. Indeed, any number of films popular with young people in recent years have gone well over two hours including Saving Private Ryan, Schindler's List, and Star Wars Episode One: The Phantom Menace. On the one hand these are long films that students have mentioned as being important to them. On the other hand, these films have multiple storylines, often rapid editing of action scenes, and offer visually rich images in each shot with layers of information filling the screen. To get some sense of the difference it is instructive to watch Titanic and A Night to Remember, the 1958 British film of the disaster, and to simply note the amount of information contained in each shot. What all the films have in common, however, regardless of their length, is a clear end point at which the credits will roll and the audience may leave.

Are attention spans getting shorter, or just faster? Either way, what are the implications for those of us teaching writing and reading of print texts? What do we do if these print texts seem ponderously slow and inefficient in their presentation of one word at a time to students more comfortable and adept with the rapid, associative processing of multiple modes of information on television? I certainly have long believed in the value of fastwriting or freewriting as a way of generating ideas and developing thoughts on a page.

Such disconnected thoughts, however, are not always the same as thinking. There are limitations to what such writing and responses can offer. Yet we live in a capitalist society in which greater speed and efficiency is highly valued. And on television, the more information that can be communicated also means the more selling that can take place. Commercials in the Fifties routinely lasted a minute; today it is rare to find a commercial one minute in length. Instead there are two to four (or more) commercials in each minute, thus raising the advertising revenue of the network or station.

When we find ourselves unable to process quickly the information before us we, as a culture, are prone to what Albert Borgmann sees as a sense of "sullenness" (6). If we cannot figure out and respond quickly to what is being written, we either give up or ask that the message be streamlined so that it can be processed more efficiently. Though the latter is not always a bad response, what we do seem less willing to do when we watch television is to stop, ponder, and work through what is puzzling or difficult. After all, that's what the zapper is for. As each day goes by new media technologies offer us greater and faster access to larger amounts of information, but we can only build knowledge and wisdom from that information if we have the time to consider and reflect on the information at hand. As professionals -- both those involved with such technologies and those who are not -- we have probably developed those skills and understand those distinctions. We may have to make our students more overtly aware of the cultural love affair with speed, however, and complicate the allure of immediate communication and response. For many reasons the answer to this dilemma is probably not to hope for slower computers or a less rapid flow of images on television. Instead, I think the answer lies in what we do to help our students step back from their remote controls and their keyboards to consider the implications for how these technologies have been shaped by the dominant culture and how they in turn are shaping the nature of our discourse.

Zapping with a Purpose

The conventional way of discussing television is to portray it in terms of programmers and audiences. The former are aggressive and manipulative and the latter are passive and malleable. Along with the paradox of audience members being both isolated when viewing in their domestic settings but part of a larger audience in the society that is watching the show at the same time they are, this popular view of the audience is one in which individual members are seen as having no real way to reply in an organized way to what they are watching. Margaret Morse says that "Your television (via the intermediaries of hosts, anchors, and spokespersons of all kinds) cajoles, instructs, and directs you incessantly" (6) and Stephen Heath adds that, "Sitting in front of the television screen, we have always to remember that, whatever else, programs are so much wrapping paper and that what is being wrapped up for delivery (to advertisers) is us, an audience" (271).

The domestic settings in which we watch television do isolate us from the events we are watching, even as they bring the public world into our homes. Yet scholars such as Morse and Todd Gitlin maintain that, when we receive these images of the public world in our homes or dorm rooms -- events and images that may run directly counter to our own beliefs -- we are cut off from any public discourse or response we might make beyond our ability to turn the set off (Gitlin 521; Morse 39). Certainly if a viewer is watching television alone in a domestic space there is not the opportunity for conversation about the program that there would be if the viewer was out at a play or attending a political rally. People also would feel rather silly talking back to their televisions, if they were watching alone. In this way television is different than other oral forms of communication that it might resemble; in other words a speech on television is a different experience for the viewer than attending a speech with an audience.

On the other hand, watching television alone is not that different than what we expect from reading in terms of isolation and the power to respond. The idea that books bring the world into our domestic spaces, are usually read in isolation, and offer no form

of organized response aside from closing the book is not seen as problematic in our society, but can be constructed as some of the more common and powerful arguments for reading. Yet with television, these same attributes are constructed as being dangerous and manipulative. This difference in how these acts are regarded can be traced, at least in part back to the conventional wisdom, shared by the students in this study, that reading is an active and worthy activity while television watching is passive and wasteful.

As I noted in the last chapter, however, students, when they watch television attentively, are engaging in an active reading of the televised "text." Barry Brummett argues that the audience is not passive, but that critics of television cannot see how viewers are engaging with televised texts "through expositional spectacles" (24). Unless we ask these students about their interpretations and analysis of television programs, however, this active reading remains hidden, just as their readings of print texts would remain hidden unless we ask for reading responses, essays, and class discussions. Is it only a coincidence that the pattern students describe about the people with whom they have watched television, and how that pattern has changed over the years, is not remarkably different from the way engagement with print literacy is expected to progress in our culture? Early television watching and reading experiences are often communal and family oriented. Mary, for example, talked of how she watched Star Trek: The Next Generation with her father each week and how her whole family watched television together, as a family activity, on Sunday evenings. Karen and Irene spoke about how much their parents read to them as children and how much they enjoyed those experiences. These comments were repeated by most of the students I spoke with. Parents read to children, chose programs and watched with children. As the children got a bit older the pattern shifted with the children reading aloud and the parents watching programs with children that the children might select. Yet as the students I spoke with reached adolescence, both reading and watching television began to be described as more private and isolated acts. Reading and writing were expected to be done quietly and television watching was often described

as being done as far from parents as possible. Though the communal living situations of first-year students create opportunities for communal television watching -- and much response and interpretive conversation, as I described in the last chapter -- this parallel description many students provided of their patterns of reading and watching television is a correlation that, while beyond the scope of this project, is worthy of further study.

It is also important to realize that, for most of these students, remote control devices offer considerably more ways to respond to television programs than simply using the off switch. The ease of using a remote control device means that the viewers can act quickly, without trouble, on their critical judgments. The growth of multiple cable television channels that has accompanied the growth of remote control use -- more than 80 percent of U.S. households now have a remote control device (Bellamy 211) -- has meant that viewers have both choices and the power to be choosy. The use of remote control devices, the practice of zapping around the channels, has developed into a form of narrative control for the students I spoke with. Although two of the students spoke of not liking to zap at all, the rest said that they would zap for at least some of their television viewing time, though not when they had a specific program they wanted to watch intently. As I noted above, zapping gives the viewer the ability to change easily from a show that gets boring, or to explore what better shows might be on the air. Through the remote control device, students often exercise their critical judgments about television programs quickly and decisively. Andrew said, "I've got it (zapping) down to a science. I'll just keep pushing it at a steady motion. I'll just look at it and judge it right away." Again, here is a confidence and capability in evaluating television programs that few students expressed toward judging print texts or even their own writing. It also again reveals the ability of viewers to process visual information quickly. If you are familiar with the forms and conventions, it only takes a glance at the screen to know whether a program is a talk show, newscast, sitcom, soap opera, music video, and so on. The effect of the visual on the way students read television is an issue I will address in the next chapter.

More than just allowing the viewer to escape boredom, however, zapping also lets the viewer essentially create an individual mosaic or collage of meaning out of the fragments that go whizzing by. Just as television creates meaning out of movement, of images, of narratives, from one program to the next, students at times use the movement of their zapping to make meaning. This kind of television viewing, that is not as concerned with narrative coherence and is more in control of the viewer, contains in it an element of play (Bellamy and Walker 163). Each fragment of programming does not exist in isolation but is read in the context of the fragments preceding it; similarly, our reception of any fragment is altered by the context of the next destination of our zapping. This kind of associative, non-linear combination of elements is not unlike a "found" poem or collage that requires us to make meaning out of juxtaposed words or images. Such a collage of zapping happens if the viewer simply proceeds from one channel to the next in the order the cable company has arranged. A number of students, however, spoke of zapping as being a much more controlled and conscious process than the popular image of mindlessly flipping through the channels. As David said in Chapter Two, he has a set of channels that he restricts himself to when zapping, including Comedy Central, Fox, MTV, and HBO. And as Joe said in Chapter Two he will often zap among two shows and a sporting event as he watches. In this kind of zapping, the student with the remote control is creating meaning by drawing fragments from several different texts and then doing the interpretive work needed to reconcile the competing messages into some kind of coherent viewing experience.

This is not to suggest that all zapping is done so purposefully and employing a kind of critical consciousness. Zapping is sometimes a distracted search for something diverting to watch. Even more than just watching one channel, zapping can be like wandering the shopping mall, with no goal, no purpose beyond a low level of stimulation, and no particular attentiveness to the distractions around you. This is a kind of zapping that is familiar and is often the stereotype of the young person with a remote control device in

hand. My contention is that, though the distracted, purposeless zapping happens, so does a kind of zapping in which students display agency and judgment about when and why they push the next button.

The quick reading of programming that is required for effective zapping comes from practice and experience, just like learning to skim an article for a particular piece of information. If you haven't watched enough television to know the forms and genres, you can't zap with the same speed and confidence. At the same time, programs that students have grown up watching, from Sesame Street to MTV often use collage and rapid cutting and editing within the program, allowing viewers to gain experience at processing images presented in an associative, non-linear manner. It should come as little surprise that the willingness and ability to zap is often defined by generational divisions. Older viewers are less likely to zap than younger viewers; one study in the mid-90s found that the most active zappers, 71 percent, were under the age of 40 and that the most active of that group were between 18 and 23 (Bellamy and Walker 97) Again, Andrew said, "My dad always yells at me and tells me I'll break the TV because I'm going too fast. I just go at a steady pace." Although Bellamy and Walker cite research indicating that gender is the other significant determining factor in terms of zapping around channels -- they note that current research indicates few differences in terms of class or race -- particularly when control of the zapping is at issue between a man and woman (127). Such differences in remote control use diminish significantly, however, in studies with respondents under the age of 30 (130). This is consistent with the responses from the students I interviewed, in which male and female students who said they engaged in zapping described virtually identical practices.

What might seem initially puzzling, in terms of a college writing class, however, is that the same students who seem comfortable with the associative and fragmented nature of zapping, get frustrated and confused with print works that are not straightforward narrative. Essays and fiction that work with collage or poetry often bother students and

meet with anxiety or resistance. This happens, in part, because students unfamiliar with such forms in print, often miss the rhetorical cues that help experienced readers make meaning from the printed work. They understand the cues used on television, but have yet to learn them as fully in print. I maintain that if we uncover for students the connections between the way they process images and metaphors as they zap and the way such material can appear on the page we can help bring their authority and experience with collage and associative reading on television into the classroom in a productive way. This process can at least help in reducing their initial anxiety and resistance and enable them to gain the vital experience and practice with the print texts that will eventually result in a similar authority and confidence in their reading and writing. I will discuss this more fully in Chapter Five.

The Invisible Author

Yet while there may be some connections that we can make between the experiences of the television viewer as part of an audience and a student writer in a first-year composition course, there is also one particularly important difference: a sense of authorship. Television usually lacks a clear, singular authorial voice or point of view. Most of us, including most students, are stumped if asked to name the "author" of a television program. Whom do we mean by "author" in such a context? The scriptwriters? The producer of the series? The director of the episode? The newscaster reading the news? Or the reporters and researchers who have gathered and written the stories? The talk show host? Or the talk-show host's staff? The rhetorical skills that students exhibited in their conversations about watching television did not include a sense of authorship of any kind for the programs they discussed. With the exception of Peter, who, as I noted in Chapter Two, was the only student to talk at length about the quality of the writing on television programs, none of the students assigned any specific sense of creative agency to anyone involved with television programs -- from producers to directors to writers to actors.

Students spoke of television programs by the name of the program and by the characters portrayed on the programs. Jennifer said, "I just watch the people on the show. I've never really spent much time trying to figure out who is making it." Even when they discussed news and documentary programs, they spoke of the content, not who might be involved in the production or whether those involved in the production might be promoting a particular point of view. Julie said, "If I watch a show and I like it I'll think it was a good show, but I won't think, 'Oh, it was written well.' It's just that one show will be better than the other."

This sense of being un-authored is not only limited to television. Winifred Wood talks about some students in her film courses having a similar lack of awareness and even resistance to see films as being "authored" rather than more spontaneous productions. Yet even students who are not film buffs can name and describe the job of Stephen Spielberg or George Lucas and more than half of the students I spoke with could name other well-known filmmakers from Martin Scorsese to the Farrelly brothers to Oliver Stone to Jane Campion. None of the students could name a single producer of a television series, a position in television programming with the same authoring and authoritative position as the film director (Newcomb and Hirsch 510).

Although there is no clear author for most television programs, that does not mean that there is not an implied narrative presence. As Sarah Kozloff points out, "The 'implied author' of a television show...is not a flesh-and-blood person but rather a textual construct, the viewer's sense of the organizing force behind the world of the show" (78). For example, the implied author of South Park might be a rebellious adolescent boy while for ER or NYPD Blue it might be a serious, urban adult with a social conscience. Though television programs often use "hosts" for programs such as Unsolved Mysteries or talk shows or voice-over narration for shows such as documentaries or The Wonder Years (79), as viewers we don't mistake those narrative stand-ins for the actual creators of the programs. More often the textual context is established through an opening theme song or

visual sequence, not by the names of the creators of the programs. Indeed, as I noted above, the names of the creators of programs -- producers, directors, writers -- have often now been pushed to edge of the screen while previews fill up the rest and distract us from the literally marginalized names.

Consequently, the "message" from a television program may be more open-ended and polyvocal than most of us realize when we are watching alone and not in immediate discussion with other viewers. The message usually comes in the form of actions and dialogue not from any explicit authorial voice. At the same time, paradoxically, there is a unity of point of view provided to the television viewer through the view of the camera. The camera, and the person who points the camera, does not speak. Yet, as the viewer delegates his gaze to the camera, it provides a seemingly objective view of events that seems to provide the viewer with a truth, with a coherent message. The camera flattens, distances, and de-personalizes all comments and actions and delivers them to us in the same spot -- our television set. There is for the viewer, then, a sense of impersonal authority -- if not of an individual "author" -- in the point of view from the camera. The action takes place in front of the camera and we sit, detached and alone, on the other side and decide about the nature and quality of the message.

This stance is sometimes reflected in our students' writing in which events, people, places are viewed with a kind of impersonal detachment, as if through a camera lens. Because the camera does not reflect on the story, but allows the message to be drawn by the audience from the actions in front of it, our students sometimes write the same kind of story that is strong on plot and action, but lacks reflection or commentary. The writer assumes that the audience, like a television viewing audience on the other side of the camera, will get the message by watching the actions and understanding the plot. The idea of an author controlling and reflecting on the story is a rhetorical convention with which they have little familiarity. Instead they are often writing screenplays, but without actors or other collaborators to provide them with the emotional and intellectual introspection and

depth we experience through performance. The significance of plot and how students experience it on television with actors is an issue I will address more fully in the next chapter when I look at student papers.

In a college writing course, however, few concepts are more important than authorship. We may be willing to talk about the death of the author in theory seminars, but we expect students, especially first-year students, to write from the position of an author. Whether they are writing memoir, argument, or criticism, we teach our students to write with a specific and identifiable point of view. Pick up most handbooks or rhetorics and you can easily find statements such as "Revising means shaping and developing the whole argument, with an eye to audience and purpose; when you revise, you are ensuring that you have accomplished your aim" (Crusius and Channel, 748) Or "Writing can be described as an inward journey. The process of discovering what resides within your mind and your spirit begins anew each time you start a writing project" (Ford and Ford 8). Even textbooks that focus on media and popular culture expect students to step out of the audience and write as an individual critic. "As a critic, you respond to a text by creating one of your own, by writing out your 'reading' of it in the form of a paper or article" (Harris and Rosen 8). Similar statements can be found in many course syllabi and are uttered time and again in writing classrooms across the country. We want our students to stop being part of the audience and to display on the page for us the individual qualities of their minds.

It is not that students don't understand the concept of authorship. The Romantic view of print authorship as the creative action of an individual dominates the culture, including the minds of our students. Many of the students I spoke with could name the authors of books they had read. (Although in class sessions I have also seen students over the years begin discussion of a single author's work by referring to the writer as "they" until I ask them to look again at the name of the author.) Many students I have taught over the years have so internalized the Romantic conception of authorship that they are

skeptical that ordinary mortals can be taught to write (or they are convinced that they are artists whose creative impulses should not be tampered with by a mere composition teacher).

My point, however, is not that students don't know what an author is. Instead, because they watch more television than read works with a strong authorial presence such as articles and essays assigned in first-year composition classes, they have much less experience with what an author *does*. The communication, the narratives, they are most familiar with come from the author-less medium of television. Just because they can summon the Romantic image of an author writing in a garret does not mean they understand how writing teachers see that consciousness transferred to the page. Consequently, when students write narratives or arguments or research, they are more likely to replicate the forms of communication with which they are most familiar. This is why student writing may often be strong on plot or dialogue or even description, yet the reflective or analytical move valued in the academy can be more difficult for students to understand and execute because they are not as experienced with communication that provides that information as part of its form.[6] Again in the final chapter I will discuss strategies for addressing the issue.

I asked the students I interviewed if they thought they could write a television script, whether that would easier than writing essays in their writing courses. I was surprised at how many students -- almost two-thirds -- answered the question negatively. For example, Julie said, "I guess I could if I sat down and thought about it. But it's like everything has been used up, all the scenarios. I don't think I could come up with anything different than stuff that has been used on one of the shows." In their answers, however, they again demonstrated an understanding of the forms and conventions that they saw every week on television programs and how those would have to be worked out in writing a script. When Andrew said he thought writing for television wouldn't be easy and that he didn't think he could do the same quality work as television script writers, he also

indicated that he understood in detail the challenges writing for a weekly series would present:

> You have to think about future episodes. How do you want this character to come out in future episodes? What do you want to happen to him? Do you want this to be a good preppy kid? A bad kid who drinks and does drugs? You have to think about things to carry it on week after week after week to get your viewers to watch it again and again.

Only one student, David, who was working on a play, answered the question with an unequivocal "yes." The other students who said that they thought they could write a script tended to qualify their response by the type of show or the genre. Kevin said, "I think I could write a Simpsons, but not an X-Files. I'm not bizarre enough to pull that kind of stuff out of my head. I could come up with a Simpsons though." And Peter, whose background in reading made him the most overtly aware of the role of writing on television programs, said he thought he couldn't write dialogue well enough to compose original scripts. But he did see the possibility of using his critical abilities. "If somebody gave me a script I could definitely make some suggestions for improvement. Like a script doctor."

These student responses again illustrate the difference in the perception of television as a readerly, not a writerly text. The students could read, interpret, and criticize what they watched, but they were unprepared for the possibility of having to create a similar text themselves. Television is a medium they are used to receiving, but not producing. Their responses also indicate a difference that can be drawn between writing for television and television-like writing. Although I do see student writing that lacks a strong authorial presence, a rhetorical "I" and takes the position of the camera watching the characters in the work as if they would soon be inhabited by actors, I rarely see works that actually replicate television scripts that are explicitly constructed so that they can be picked up by actors and interpreted for an audience. Instead of writing as if they are producing a television program, with camera and stage directions to go along with their

dialogue, students are more likely to write as if their readers are watching the program with them, and can thus see the same things on the screen. Students take for granted details in their writing for a number of reasons. Still, I believe that the influence of watching television programs, where students know that a huge audience has seen the same programs as they have, even if they were alone in their room at the same time, adds to the tendency of student writers to write as if the details can be taken for granted. We all saw the same show, so details can be taken for granted. Or even if we missed last night's episode, we have seen the show in the past so that we don't need to have the main character described to us (let alone her apartment or her best friend.) One of the easiest ways to explore the difference between television-like writing and the kind of detailed reflective or analytical writing favored in composition courses is, as I will discuss further in Chapter Five, to confront head on the way television texts are created and make explicit the need for images and actors to make television programs work.

Reliable Sources

The unity of point of view provided to the television viewer through the camera provides an authority that reinforces this clear and resolvable narrative on the screen. The camera does not speak; and the person who points the camera is invisible. Yet it provides a seemingly objective view of events that seems to provide the viewer with a detached and de-personalized truth, with a coherent message. Even when competing voices are shown, they are all filtered through a single, seeming neutral and author-less, point of view that is the transparent camera. There is only one way to see something because that is the way it comes through the screen. Every voice is subsumed by that point of view so that dominant and oppositional statements merge into a single, containable point of view. By being so contained, and merged, there is, again, the illusion of resolution, reinforced by the pithy closing statement of television correspondent. As Baudrillard maintains, there is only one way of seeing the images on the screen, only one view (23).

Thus what happens before the camera has an illusion of reality and objectivity, allowing the viewers to "see things" for themselves through an objective and detached camera rather than through mediated words on a page. Some students say that they find this sense of being able to "see" things for themselves, lends television a greater authority than print. The students implied a sense of the slipperiness of language compared to the hard objectivity of the image. As Kevin said, "It's so much better to get it live and on the screen than going through newspaper articles and stuff like that. It (television) is so much more accessible." And for some students the problem was not only print, but the idea of the single authorial presence behind the printed words. Karen said, "If I had to choose the news on television or the news in the paper, I'd prefer the news on television because I have this picture of newspaper editors being really biased." And Julie also said that, "When I want to be able to really know what happened someplace I'll turn on the TV. That way I can see it for myself rather than through the eyes of one person who is writing about it."

This idea of "seeing it for yourself" is, of course, part of the great power of television. It plays on the immediacy television can offer and its sense of liveness to provide us with the illusion of unmediated communication. The idea of seeing it with your own eyes is a powerful measure of reliability and accuracy in our culture. David Marc points out the central authoritative role of television by noting that for a revolt to take place in the Nineteenth Century it had to gain control of the public squares; today revolutionaries must set their sites on the television stations (57). Marc imagines a situation in which a military figure appears on CNN declaring that he has deposed the president and taken power.

> Would the viewer scoff at this as nonsense, or would the very fact that this person is appearing on television lend credence to his claim? Indeed, wouldn't the burden of proof fall on the elected government to demonstrate that a coup had not taken place? What strategy might the elected government choose to attempt to reassert itself? It would have to "take back" CNN (for Ted Turner, or perhaps away from him) or make convincing counterbroadcasts over other networks (57).

It is difficult to imagine a way in which print, be it newspapers or novels, could command the same form of cultural authority in our society. What would give the coup leader his credibility would be his "live" presence on television, more than what he might actually say.

It is not without purpose, then, that so many television stations title their news programs Eyewitness News. The potential of television to provide live and seemingly unmediated communication during a breaking news story gives it the illusion of "liveness" in many of its broadcasts. This sense of "liveness", in turn, provides television with a great deal of authority and credibility with viewers. What we see on television does not seem to have been mediated or interpreted through a single consciousness the way an article in print does. People talking to a news reporter on television talk to the reporter, not the camera, giving the viewer the illusion of dropping in on a more "normal" conversation. Only the "representatives of television" such as news anchors (or talk show hosts or the President) get to talk directly to the viewer (Morse 38) Often, in current broadcasting, even the reporter, who may talk toward the camera, creates the illusion of being in conversation with the news anchors sitting at the main desk, rather than with the viewers. Courtney said, "When you're watching, it puts it all in front of you so you don't have to imagine it anymore." Even though a news story on television may be reported by someone standing in front of the camera, we still turn to television news primarily for its immediacy and its powerful images.

It is this impression of reality, of the camera turned on to the "real world" that makes television significantly different not only from print, but from film as well. We expect artifice on film, delivered in the theatre. But our television screen functions more like a special window in our house that can bring to use the events of the world (at a comfortable remove). Our view of the world is then mediated by what we see through that window. So, while violent crimes in schools may have decreased every year since 1991, the rash of highly televised school shootings in the late Nineties, increased the public

perception that schools were more dangerous and led to a flurry of proposed laws to protect schools from what was actually a minimal threat.

We then look to television to give us the live and authoritative version of the important events of the day, the version we can see for ourselves. And because of the power of images and the immediacy and power of the real or virtual communal gathering around the television to see the breaking news, our memories of the important public events of the day often revolve around television. Ask someone under the age of forty for her or his first memory of a public event and it may very well be tied to having watched it on television. For me it was watching on television the funeral of the Apollo One astronauts who had been killed in the launch-pad fire. Even it we don't see the event "live", it gets replayed so often immediately after it happens, in the same form that it happen "live" that it may seem as if we did see it the first time. In a study begun immediately after the Challenger space shuttle disaster, psychologists Ulric Neisser and Nicole Harsch interviewed students to find out where they were when they heard the news. They then reinterviewed the same students several years later and found that many of the students who had not watched the disaster "live" on television, insisted that they had, in fact, seen it happen on television. When shown their earlier interviews they did not remember their initial description of events (Sturken 37). Neisser and Harsh concluded that, "The hours of later television watching may have been more strongly rehearsed, more unique, more compatible with a social script than the actual occasions of first contact" (qtd in Sturken 37). It is not surprising to hear that people would rewrite their memories to include television because, not only would they have had the chance to see the events as they first appeared replayed time and again, but television is where we expect to find the immediate and authoritative version that we can see for ourselves and share that version with our imagined community.

As television becomes our virtual window to the world we don't identify with the camera, any more than we identify with our living-room window, but we do delegate our

look to it (Grossberg 133). Because this televisual window often brings us real events in real time, it also makes the line between "real" and "manufactured" events more difficult -- if often not impossible -- to discern. After a while, after the television movie of the news event has been made and broadcast, it begins to become difficult to separate the real story from the fictional adaptation. As Margo Jefferson notes, in this process of turning news events into entertainment the events "get reshaped, not only through editing, but also through storytelling, just as the ancient chronicles of war and conquest once did. And thus they become part legend and part history as they are passed down" (Jefferson).

Print, on the other hand, is never the reality it represents. As theorists have pointed out, the black marks on the page are abstract representations of real objects. There is nothing about words on the page that indicates "liveness" or immediacy. In fact it is precisely the opposite. In the academy we rely on print not for immediacy or "liveness", but for reflection, analysis, and detachment. And this detachment and reflection we often expect to represent the thoughts and insights of a single consciousness, the interpretation of an individual. Again, the humanistic foundation on which composition and literature are constructed still maintains, at a fundamental level, that what we teach can somehow help individual students to improve themselves whether as scholars, students, individuals, or members of society. Mediation through a single consciousness is as much the point of print as the illusion of unmediated liveness is the point of television.

Consequently when we measure the quality of printed work we search for signs of the logical workings of that single writer's mind. We examine the writing for signs of that writer's *ethos*. *Ethos* in a piece of intellectual writing is demonstrated through the quality of the analysis, the attention to detail, the seemingly thoughtful use of data and outside sources. Although figures on television, from news readers to talk show hosts to sitcom stars, often create a sense of *ethos*, particularly given the daily or weekly repetition of words and actions, theirs is an *ethos* that results from viewers' emotional responses to the people on the screen. Thus actors who play doctors in television dramas can do effective

advertisements for medicine, not because their authority is based on what they actually know or have done or can demonstrate through their intellect, but because the image they portray, the figure they have become in the simulacra, makes them "feel" like a doctor to the viewer at home.

The paradox about this issue, however, is that, though students will say they find television more authoritative than print, they will often read print assigned in college courses uncritically, accepting claims and data without question. If they found the information in a book, they assume it is accurate. Such readings point to the institutional power of the academy in projecting its authority to students. We are all taught to regard schools as repositories of truth and facts, certainly that is how elementary and high schools portray themselves to their students. Consequently, most students don't arrive at college expecting that the truths and facts in their textbooks and the library are socially constructed and contested. Their reading of a newspaper in their home might be quite different than the way they read an article in a college course.

The other part of the paradox is that, though they may assign more authority to television, students are not necessarily uncritical when it comes to the reliability of what they see on television. They may see television as more reliable than print, but they often remain skeptical of the material on television as well. First, they are often aware that what they are seeing is mediated, and created with the goal of higher ratings in mind. Peter, one of the few students who regarded print as unambiguously more reliable, said that:

> TV kills itself with what it puts on...The networks are pretty famous for suiting their own agendas and putting their own spin on things. Like the show that put the explosive device under the Ford truck to make sure it did explode. Like Fox did the alien autopsy. They hyped it for weeks. 'You decide if it's real!' Then a year later they do a thing on the greatest hoaxes of all time and there is the alien autopsy.

Andrew also voiced skepticism about the motives behind some of the programs he watched on television. He mentioned MTV's The Real World, where a group of young

people are housed and filmed together for several months. Andrew said that the first season of the show was interesting, but that subsequent seasons had gone downhill because, "now people just want to get on it to launch their acting careers, so they will make things happen instead of you just seeing what things might naturally happen."

Several students also talked about their awareness of the way in which seeing events on television is not the same as seeing them in person. Courtney talked about watching Trauma: Life in the ER, a program that documents and re-enacts cases that happen in emergency rooms. She said that she preferred it to ER, the fictional program, because it was more "based in reality." Yet she had questions about the reliability of what she saw on Trauma. For example, she said she imagined that people whose cases appeared on the show must get paid in order to be willing to share that much pain with the public. She also questioned the "reality" of what she saw on the program. "It's not even really for medical teaching; it's for entertainment. I know they probably edit out a lot and change it to make it more entertaining. They do a lot of re-enactments. So it maybe doesn't always happen the way they show it happen."

In a similar way, Kevin talked about having watched programs such as World's Scariest Police Chases and World's Most Bizarre Medical Cases on Fox. Though he found such programs occasionally appealing, he also realized that they were showing events he could only watch through the mediating influence of the television screen. Sounding as if he could be a French theorist, he said:

> TV sanitizes things. It makes it look like it's not real. Stuff like the police chases, all that is real. But there is so much fake stuff on TV that even when you know it's not (fake), even at some subconscious level you think that it is. If you saw it right in front of you, you'd say "Oh my God!" and start freaking out. But when you see it on TV you point and laugh. It's still people getting killed and there's nothing funny about that. But for some reason when it's removed it's entertainment, not disaster.

What this paradox again illuminates is what results from deep experience with any kind of text. In this case, because students have watched a great deal of television, they

have an understanding of form and content, what can be manipulated, and how it looks when it is manipulated. Consequently they can be quite skeptical and critical of television because they know how to read it. In fact the ability to discern manipulation may be part of what makes the medium more authoritative for some of them; the more we can understand how something works, the more we trust it when it is working well. Certainly academics become more comfortable judging scholarly articles as they learn the ins and outs of research methods and rhetorical strategies. The same students often have less experience with determining the *ethos* of a writer or the quality of analysis in a scholarly essay. They have read relatively few articles or essays of the kind they will confront in college; their primary reading experiences in schools have either been with textbooks that most often present material as objective fact, or with literature that they are asked to read in order to pass quizzes, fill out worksheets, and write expository summary essays. Students can't yet determine how and when they are being manipulated in the kind of print they are assigned in college. This unfamiliarity leads either to a dismissal of all work as manipulative, that way you never get suckered in, or an uncritical acceptance of anyone who seems to write with authority and data.

It is not novel to say that an integral part of teaching writing is the teaching of critical reading skills. Even so, we may need to spend even more time in our courses on teaching critical reading strategies and skills than we have in the past. We can't take for granted student experience with critical reading. Yet there is a complex response to television of acceptance and skepticism that, in a writing class, we do not acknowledge or address. Perhaps we would be able to begin teaching critical reading skills if we also drew on students' critical television reading skills. If we can help students begin to unpack the paradox of how they consider the authority and reliability of a medium they read well, a paradox they may not have examined but can articulate when asked, then perhaps we can find more paths into the same considerations of how they can read print more critically and creatively. Such reading of print will invariably lead to better writing.

The Trivial Tube

The consideration of what information is most authoritative is not necessarily the same as what information is most significant. Though the students I talked with might say that they found television more reliable than print, they also said that they did not usually turn the television on for news or current events programs. For these students, information and news were not the primary purposes of watching television, though they were mentioned as possible purposes even by those who said they never watched the news. Instead, television was perceived primarily as a medium of entertainment, devoid of ideas. "TV is just there to take up time, to entertain you. You're not going to get any big lessons from it," Jennifer said. More than half of the students talked about a difference in what they perceived as the intent of a television program compared with the intent of a piece of writing. Print texts were perceived as having a weightier and worthier purpose. Peter said, in the only comment to touch on the formal differences in writing for the two media:

> I think in general when somebody writes a book they want you to think about something, some kind of moral or story. They really have something they want to convey. I think that a lot of times television is written because it has to be written. You have to put out twenty-four episodes a year until you get canceled. Television is supposed to be more about entertainment. It's not supposed to get you to think about anything challenging.

This perception, that television is a medium of pure entertainment as a vehicle for selling advertising, and ultimately a mindless waste of time, results from television's reliance on emotion, images, and quick irony. This contrasts with the academy's equal reliance on analysis, words, and depth.

Although in Chapters One and Two I addressed the dominance of emotion as a form of appeal on television, it is important to revisit the issue in terms of how students see the purpose of watching television. As Lawrence Grossberg points out, televisual excess takes many forms, such as stylistic or visual, but perhaps its most important excess is its emotional excess or the way programs and advertisements are often structured

around extreme highs and lows of emotion (141). Television "presents an image of an affective economy marked on the one side by an extreme (postmodern) cynicism ("Life is hard and then you die") and on the other by an almost irrational celebration of the possibilities of winning against all the odds" (141). This power is reflected in the purposes students described for watching television. Although they would often begin a conversation with a general comment about how, by watching documentaries, they could learn things by watching television, they talked more expansively and enthusiastically about the way watching television made them feel. Irene said, "It's just like walking down the street and seeing someone you know. If they smile and say, 'Hi' it makes you feel better. If they walk right by you it makes you feel worse. I think TV has the same effect, whether it is a depressing show or a happy show." Irene was not alone in talking about how she used television to cheer her up when she felt down or lonely. Several of the students mentioned having watched more television during their first semester at college when they felt lonely and unsure about their new surroundings. Courtney said, "I really hated it here first semester, so I watched a lot of TV to escape from things, to make me feel better."

Students' emphasis on pleasure and emotion and escape as the primary reasons they watch television also explains why teachers' attempts to bring television into classrooms in a cultural studies context are sometimes met with an unexpected resistance. Though students may be initially enthusiastic about having a television on in the classroom, that enthusiasm may evolve into protests that the teacher is asking the students to "read too much" into what is happening on the screen and that such analysis will result in draining the pleasure from the experience. Daniel Wild maintains that there often is a similar response by students to the use of film in a writing class. Because film -- and television -- are experienced by students primarily in private, affective, and pleasurable terms, they can resist trying to bring such media under the lens of academic analysis (25). As Julie said about television, "I don't want to read things into it, though I guess you

could. You just look at it and watch what's there." Attempts to engage students in more critical readings of television texts, or in Wild's case film, can turn initial enthusiasm into hostility "when composition teachers are seen as transgressing into the terrain of their (students') popular culture to dissect and desecrate the experience of film" (Wild 24).

This is a phenomenon I have experienced numerous times in using film and television in writing courses. It comes, again, in part from our separation in the academy and the culture at large of the emotional from the critical. Because the assumption among students and many of their teachers is that analysis requires the denial of emotion and therefore pleasure, there results a fear that any critical engagement with television will ruin the affective experience of watching a favorite program. If we can do a better job of teaching that emotional and critical responses can be connected and complementary, that critical insights can lead to deeper levels of appreciation and, by extension, pleasure, and that the ability to read any text with a critical eye is not a requirement that one always do so, then perhaps we can both convince students to approach criticism more enthusiastically, and to blur the borders between different forms of communication.

Because of the emphasis on speed, images, and emotions in television programming, it is a medium that is generally considered to be superficial and anti-intellectual. Particularly for those who have learned to live in a world, such as the academy, that privileges print with its deliberate, detached, and linear accretion of data and knowledge, the world of electronic communication seems superficial, ephemeral, and frivolous. This divide is often exacerbated by generational differences in how teachers experience electronic media and how often much younger students do. Such a divide can make teachers feel alienated from their students, and vice versa, and uneasy in the classroom. For many in the academy, "Surface seems shallow, easy, hollow, flashy. History offers a sense of *depth* (we think without irony) of genealogy and belongingness, of seriousness. Understandably, we attempt to teach our children to value history over the easy seductions of space" (Johnson-Eiola 186). Consequently, as teachers we can buy into

the dominant cultural position that print is an instrument that a mature person learns to use skillfully and judiciously, while television is a distraction that requires no skill or depth of knowledge to watch (Johnson-Eiola 189). (There is a critique to be considered about the superficiality of the moving image as I will address in Chapter Five.) Certainly the students I talked with had adopted this widespread belief. "TV is just there," Andrew said. "You don't need creativity to watch TV. It's just there and you're seeing what the director wants you to see."

To see television as superficial and intellectually insignificant means that, rather than taking it seriously, as viewers we can engage in its often self-mocking, cynical, and often ironic stance. As I noted in the previous chapter, irony on television is a rhetorical device and an attitude that students both recognize and often appropriate. Mary said, "I can't stand soap operas. I had a babysitter who used to watch General Hospital. All these people would 'mysteriously' die or get kidnapped all the time and we're all supposed to be *so* worried. It was just so fake." The awareness of those who create television of the medium itself, an awareness that is often transmitted to the viewer, makes television a more ripe field for ironic response than a form such as film which rarely acknowledges its artifice or structure (Caughie 53). Many of the forms that pervade television, such as the sitcom and the talk show, begin with an ironic, cynical stance and so encourage our response in kind. As John Leonard points out, no one should have been surprised when one of the most bizarre televised events of 1994, the low-speed pursuit of O.J. Simpson in his white Ford Bronco, ended up the next autumn as an ironic gag on programs such as Murphy Brown and Seinfeld (59). "This is what sitcom writers do. They turn everything...into wisecracks" (59).

Also, because it is a medium of distraction, and because so much of our viewing of television is distracted, television as a medium encourages an ironic response. If you can't take it seriously enough to pay close attention, then it must be brain candy. You know it, I know it, and the people making the television programs know it. Though television brings

entertainment and the events of the day into our homes, we know that it is superficial, distracting, and ultimately insignificant. "We are comparatively indifferent to it even as it is indifferent to us (it doesn't demand our presence, yet it is always waiting for us)" (Grossberg 132). This is part of what leaves television, as a medium, with so little cultural cache. After all, though a person might boast about being a "film buff", can anyone imagine describing himself as a "TV buff" or even a "television fan"? (132) This attitude pervades student comments about television. As Andrew said, "It's all entertainment. You can't take it too seriously. Nothing like what happens on television really happens that way. People do get killed and overdose; but I just take it as entertainment, not as learning a lesson."

Andrew was not alone in maintaining that television, regardless of the hours it might occupy in a day, was, in the end insignificant, unimportant and not worthy of working out what it means or how it means it. More than half of the students I talked with were particularly dismissive of any arguments that television might have an effect on social behavior. "My Dad and I argue about that," Courtney said. "He's like, 'Well, if they didn't show it, kids wouldn't do it.' And I say, 'Well, if parents were strong enough to teach their kids right from wrong, then they wouldn't do it because they would know it was wrong.'"

If watching television, the dominant form of communication in our culture, is assumed to be entertaining, superficial, and insignificant, reading and writing in a first-year composition course, and indeed across the academy, are assumed by both teachers and students to be precisely the opposite. The work in writing course is assumed to be serious, deep, and vital to the students' intellectual growth as well as possibly the salvation of civilization as we know it. As Jennifer said, "Some days I want to watch television, everyone does. But I know that I *need* to have a writing course because you have to be able to communicate well to get along in the world. I know that's good for me, even if it gets frustrating sometimes."

I share the assumption that writing courses should be about significance and the immersion in an idea or subject in a reflective or critical way. I agree that writing is capable of depth and analysis and insight and I believe those are important qualities and skills to teach. Yet the assumed gap between the purpose of watching television and of teaching writing keeps us and our students from seeing any potential articulations about discourse, rhetoric and knowledge that exist between the two forms. When we, as teachers, don't talk with our students about these perceived differences in purpose and the accuracy of those perceptions, then we may be missing an opportunity to help our students make and communicate knowledge more effectively.

Television as a cultural force pervades all of our lives. As such it influences some of our fundamental assumptions about communication. Yet, as viewers, we can remain unaware of these influences unless we take the time to examine and interrogate what may seem to be initially innocuous responses to the medium. The students I talked to did not, in making their comments about time, speed, authorship, authority, and purpose, see the same implications about writing and reading as I did. And many of my conclusions about these implications only came after I considered and re-considered what the students had said. That is part of the difficulty in trying to understand how television affects what we try to do in the writing classroom. Television is always present in the lives of our students, and of ourselves, and so it is always present in our classes, whether there is a set in the corner of the room or not. As writing teachers we can, however, begin to examine our assumptions about television and writing as well as talk with students about theirs. In doing so we can find potentially rich ways of open up the articulations between the two media.

For two chapters I have been concerned with students' perceptions of television and writing and reading; and what they say about reading and writing is important and provocative. Yet what happens when these students sit down to watch television, or walk

into a writing classroom? How do they watch a television program? How does the visual nature of the television influence how they read programs? What are the implications of how they watch television in a social context when compared with the social context of the writing classroom. These are some of the questions I will address in the next chapter as I look at students in the act of reading television.

[1]Of course neither medium is completely spatial or temporal. There is overlap. Yet in terms of how they are constructed, and in our uses of them, print is primarily a medium of space and television one of time.

[2]This is not a concept new with the coming of television; the radio programming that preceded television, for example, was subject to the same kind of organization. Yet television has become the dominant form of both communication and narrative, particularly for most of our students.

[3]Once again, students in their responses constructed "reading" to mean primarily books and literature. If asked they would say they were more willing to read magazines, newspapers, and e-mail; though even with these forms similar comments about time did emerge.

[4]The advent of VCR's has changed this kind of scheduling to some extent, and other new technologies give viewers even more power over when they choose to watch programs. For now, however, most viewers still choose to watch programs when they are broadcast.

[5]A fuller discussion of who uses remote control devices, how often, and why can be found in Bellamy and Walker.

[6] That many students, in their high school writing experiences, have been asked to do primarily summary and report writing only exacerbates this phenomenon. Even when they write about literature in high school, many students are given assignments that focus on providing the correct answer about the content of a book. This is also not a form that encourages students to write with a clear rhetorical "I" in their work.

CHAPTER IV

READING BY THE LIGHT OF THE TUBE: MAKING MEANING FROM TELEVISION TEXTS

The verdict was unanimous. Given a choice, the students in the room would not watch this program again.

"The setups and jokes were obvious."

"The humor was stupid."

"I didn't find it all that interesting."

"The rhythm was bad. It didn't build any story, it was just one joke after another."

We had been watching the second episode of a new animated sitcom, Futurama, created by Matt Groenig, who had also created the long-running animated sitcom The Simpsons. And, as they say in show business, the reviews were not good. In fact there was a surprising degree of agreement across the four groups of students with whom I watched the episode. The jokes were obvious, the plot was predictable, the characters were types without any surprises, and the futuristic setting seemed a gimmick instead of an integral part of the series. Once again, the students' criticisms displayed a knowledge of the conventions and forms of television sitcoms and an ability to articulate what they perceived as weaknesses of the program.

Irene, for example, said, "They were trying to cram too many kinds of people into one cartoon -- the rich person, the smart person, the poor person -- just to have all the types of people. It would have been better with characters you like for who they are and that's why it would be funny."

And Julie said, "It's like a sequel is never as good as the first one, but they keep making them because they want to make money, like they did with the original. But it loses something."

Several of the students said that, because it was only the second episode of the series, it might be too early to judge the series overall and that it could develop into a better program. Again, this illustrates the understanding on the part of the students of how the series format of television programs allows the series "text" to be revised and improved over time. For these students, an individual episode could not be used as the basis for judging an entire series, any more than a sophisticated reader would judge an entire novel on the basis of one weak chapter.

Anyone who has taught writing and reading courses has experienced the occasional difficulty in getting students to respond, critically or not, to the print texts we assign them to read and write. In this chapter I will highlight the enthusiastic and critical responses I observed students making while watching television programs. In particular I will focus on their emphasis on plot awareness and analysis and discuss how such abilities are often neglected in contemporary composition courses that overlook plot in favor of character, analysis, and voice. I will also describe student responses to television advertising and explore the implications in those responses for how we respond to the overt and intense commodification of television programs. I will discuss how the images on television programs and advertising, that the students I observed read so quickly and accurately, reinforce an emphasis on speed, liveness, affect, and associative thinking that is quite different from the emphasis on recursiveness, reflection, detachment, and linearity that are the emphasis of many writing courses. Finally, I will address how issues of social class and experiences with television and print literacies influence student-teacher relationships in the classroom.

I had decided at the outset of this project that talking with students about television would not be sufficient in trying to understand how they read and responded to televised texts. Although many of us, including the students in this project, watch television alone, it is also the case that watching television is often done in a social context with friends or family. Certainly this was what the students I talked with reported to me when I conducted the individual interviews. In order to get a sense of how students read television texts, and how they make meaning from those texts through conversations both during and after the programs, I wanted to observe and talk with students as they watch television with their peers. This would also provide a basis for comparison with how first-year students discuss print texts in the institutional classroom settings of composition courses where assessment of their comments by their teacher is always a factor guiding their comments. Consequently I wanted to be able to watch programs with them, to gain a better sense of how they interpreted and criticized what they were watching. It would allow me both to see if their responses reflected what they had reported in their interviews, and to compare how they talked about specific television programs with how they talked about a specific print text.

At the end of the individual interviews I arranged for times that the students could meet with me and the other members of their class I had interviewed in order to watch and talk about television. I envisioned four groups of four students. As a result of scheduling conflicts, I ended up with two groups of four students and two groups of three students.[1] I decided to watch with groups of students for two reasons. First, I thought it more likely that students watching in a group would talk among themselves and be less conscious of my presence as a researcher and writing teacher. I did, however, understand that while they might, as a group, be less conscious of watching with me present, they would certainly know that they were being observed while watching and talking about television. Certainly the conversations following the programs would take place in a setting and context in which they knew they were talking to a researcher who was also a

writing teacher. As I discussed more extensively in Chapter Two, in a project such as this there is an ongoing need for the qualitative researcher to be continually aware of his presence and the possible effects of his presence. Consequently there were times, for example, when one particular student kept asserting that she never watched much television that I felt it was a performance intended primarily for me, though with her peers as a secondary audience as well. As I will discuss later in this chapter, my presence as a researcher also was important in terms of how students from different social classes responded to the project -- and how I responded to them. At the same time, however, other research into television-watching behavior has indicated that, when responding in groups, people were less likely to misrepresent their responses in order to impress the researcher, or if they did were more likely to be questioned about such responses by the others in the group (Morley 144).

Although I had many options about what to watch with students, in the end I decided to tape some programming and watch the same tape with each group.[2] This, at least, would offer me some basis for comparison of common or disparate responses. And, though there are many types of programming on television, given the time constraints of the sessions, I decided to watch a narrative program, rather than a documentary or news program, some advertisements, and a segment of another narrative program. Choosing programs that focused on fictional narratives reflected most closely what students themselves reported watching. Consequently we watched a full episode of Futurama, with commercials, several other sets of commercials from two different channels, and a ten-minute segment of the British television series, The Singing Detective. I will explain my reasons for these choices as they become relevant to the chapter.

Resolution Over Revelation

Futurama offered an interesting opportunity for this project. On the one hand it was a new series, the episode we watched was only the second to be broadcast and none

of the students had seen the series before they watched it for this project. Consequently it was a new experience for them and one for which they did not have too many pre-existing opinions. On the other hand, the animation and comedic style of the series clearly borrowed from The Simpsons, which at the time of this project was in its tenth season, and was known by all of the students and was quite popular with many of them. The setup of Futurama involves a delivery boy named Frye who is accidentally frozen in 1999 and awakened in 2999 and must adapt to a futuristic world and the usual sitcom range of odd characters. The plot of the particular episode we watched involved Frye's first trip to the Moon with his new friends. He is enthusiastic about going until he finds a Disney-like theme park is now the main attraction and he sets off to find the original Apollo 11 landing site in order to regain his childhood sense of wonder about the Moon.

A number of students used their familiarity with The Simpsons as a place to begin their criticisms, noting both the similarities between the series and the reasons why they thought The Simpsons succeeded while Futurama failed. As Irene noted, there were stylistic similarities between the two series that made comparison inevitable. "Whether you want to or not you automatically compare it with The Simpsons because the animation is the same and so is the approach. But The Simpsons is better," she said. And Lynn, in a comment echoed by students in several groups, added that the problem with Futurama was that using aliens and robots as the main characters of the program made it less accessible than The Simpsons. "The thing about The Simpsons is that you know people like that, even as stupid and annoying and exaggerated as they can be, you know somebody like that." Or, as Courtney put it, "With The Simpsons it's a dysfunctional family, and who can't relate to that?"

These comments indicate that, though television does not rely on referents outside of itself to be understood, that it does rely on recognizable genres, established over many years of watching by viewers. The students in this project understood both the forms of the larger genre of sitcom and of the smaller genre of animated adult sitcom. More

intriguing, given that most of the students in this project said they could not identify the author of a television program, or had even given the matter much thought, was that they understood Futurama to be the product of the same creators as The Simpsons. Although some of the students could identify Matt Groenig -- who, it should be noted, was a successful cartoonist before The Simpsons -- they could not identify other creators of The Simpsons or Futurama. What they did recognize and compare was the similar animation style and the similar form of humor in the program. Although none of the students labeled the style of humor as "ironic social satire," they did talk about how it made fun of people and institutions in society and, at the same time, made fun of futuristic, science fiction television programs. Again, as in the comments in Chapter Two, this indicates among the students an awareness of genre and form and what the formal expectations of programs within such a genre should be that could be employed quickly when watching a new program. It did not necessarily lead to a deeper critique of the reasons such a form is created for television or is popular with them, as young adult viewers. It does, however, indicate an awareness of genre in the context of television that is harder for the same students to exhibit when it comes to print forms such as the essay, as I will discuss later in this chapter.

A number of the students also criticized the episode for having a rather heavy-handed moral. This also made it unlike The Simpsons, in their view, which tends toward a relentlessly ironic stance toward any "lesson" that might be contained in a television program, and more like other traditional sitcoms. Courtney said, "The moral was supposed to be not to forget what is important in life. It had a feel-good ending, like on the shows like Full House. It's the kind of thing that makes me sick in the end." It is important to realize that the response to the emotional message of the program might have been quite different if the rest of the program had not been packed so full of social satire. A program such as ER, for example, was praised in interviews by the same students who said its plot lines gave them things to think about and that it could elicit strong emotions in

them. The unstated criticism about the moral at the end of the Futurama episode seemed more to be that it violated the students' expectations about the kind of ironic sitcom it had initially presented itself to be and that they expected from the creators of The Simpsons (whoever those creators might be).

A few of the students disagreed with that position, however, and maintained that the central idea behind the episode was more pointed and political. Etienne said the point of the episode was that people, "need to pay attention to the world and not just make money off of it, not just build on it." And Mary said that the show seemed to have an "anti-Disney kind of message. You know, don't build theme parks everywhere because that's not reality. Like the way at Disney they call it Main Street USA, but it's not like any Main Street anywhere." For these students, the sitcom on television seemed a medium particularly well suited to satirize the corporate capitalistic and postmodern phenomenon of the modern theme park. Futurama could effectively satirize the Disney-like attempt to provide an improved experience of reality because the sitcom could employ satire while simultaneously mocking its own pretensions of engaging in cultural critique. It is at moments such as these that television's presence as the focal point for mass mediating our postmodern culture is particularly visible.

Although a number of students initially said that their primary criticism of the episode was the lack of character development, they had difficulty when I asked them to explain in more detail what such a criticism meant. They would answer that the characters weren't likable or didn't develop, but could not go beyond such generalities or point to specific ways in which characters in the program could have been developed in a more interesting manner. Similar comments in student interviews about how characters in series change from season to season were also difficult for students to elaborate on.

Instead, further student comments, including initial comments about character, turned quickly to comments about plot. The comments about plot displayed a specificity lacking in the more general comments about character. Of course it was

easy for a number of students to summarize the plot. When they did summarize the plot, however, they often did so in with comments that illustrated their awareness of the ways in which the show conformed to the requirements of its genre. For example, Jennifer said:

> It did the thing that TV sitcoms tend to do. They begin with one thing happening, like delivering a package to the Moon, and then it branches off. Amy goes off and loses the keys in the crate and Frye and the other girl go off in the Moon rover and the robot goes off somewhere else so that then you have several plots going back and forth until they bring them all together at the conclusion and tie them all up.

Jennifer's comment, which is typical of comments several students made, placed the plot of the program in the context of the plots of other television sitcoms. Jennifer demonstrated that she both knew the form that sitcoms are supposed to follow and could recognize how this particular sitcom fit within that form. Understanding the expectations of genre, the constraints that shape a text into a particular form that will meet particular audience expectations, is a skill writing teachers want students to understand about print texts. As teachers we want them to understand the difference between a short story, a research essay, a personal essay, a persuasive essay, and so on -- even if we often then want them to push against such genre boundaries -- and are often surprised when they have trouble making such genre distinctions in print. Knowing that the students we teach can display and articulate an awareness of genre on television means that composition classroom discussions of genre can begin with at least one familiar touchstone for students that teachers might previously have missed using.

More of the student comments about plot, however, moved quickly from summary to a more critical evaluation of the plot. Several of the criticisms revolved around the predictability of the plot. Peter said, "You figure that when he lands on the Moon and finds an amusement park he's going to want to get out on the Moon and see it for himself. And then, when they say that the landing site has been lost for centuries, you're supposed to say 'Oh gee, they aren't going to find it, are they?'" In a similar comment Karen said, "I

knew the ending by halfway through. You obviously knew that they were going to find the lunar module and discover that the moon was more than an amusement park." In these comments and others like them the students, as in the interviews, indicated an impatience with predictability. Though they found comfort in watching a program that had conformed to the broad conventions of the genre, within those conventions they wanted plots that surprised them, kept their interest, and offered a fulfilling resolution. The plot for this episode of Futurama failed largely because of its predictability. The students demonstrated an awareness that plot is built on problems or conflicts that, in the context of television, must usually be resolved. What they criticized were the conflicts that were resolved in ways they had seen on television time and again. They expressed a desire to see plots conform to broad genre conventions but, within those conventions, to surprise them in how the central conflict is developed and resolved. The novel plot elements that were introduced were used for a single joke or two rather than complicating the plot in a fulfilling way. For example, several students mentioned a part in the episode where the main characters come across a farmer in a rustic house with an Appalachian accent. As Peter said, "Once you say 'Rednecks on the Moon' that's a funny idea. But once you say it, it's over. They didn't do anything creative with the possibility." Again, I don't want to oversell the level of critique the students were engaging in. They were not talking about plot in more philosophical terms or in terms of its place in the culture and so on. Their comments and criticisms were much more deeply connected to the affective elements of plot. They were interested in plots that engaged their curiosity and provided an emotional payoff at the end.

The manner in which these students focused on plot in their comments seems at first only a confirmation that years of watching television has dulled their minds to considering the finer elements of drama and literature -- at least as they are addressed in many English studies classrooms -- such as character and theme. Yet a closer consideration of these same student comments reveals a nuanced understanding of the

purpose and elements of plot that goes beyond mere summary. Indeed, the comments students made about plot, how it needed to work, what resolution should take place, and the emotional impact a well-resolved plot are similar to the ways in which Aristotle discusses plot in his Poetics. Aristotle, like these students, considered plot the indispensable element of any narrative and the structure on which other elements such as character should be constructed. For Aristotle:

> All human happiness or misery takes the form of action; the end for which we live is a certain kind of activity, not a quality. Character gives us qualities, but it is in our actions -- what we do -- that we are happy or the reverse. In a play accordingly they do not act in order to portray the Characters; they include the Characters for the sake of the action (231).

Although many teaching writing and literature would question Aristotle's hierarchy, I heard his thoughts about plot echoed time and again by students when they discussed the merits of television programs and the reading they did for pleasure. Given these students' awareness of and ability to articulate the elements of plot, might it serve our interests to consider again what knowledge of plot students bring to the classroom and the implications for teaching writing if we encourage that knowledge to be more explicit?

If narrative can be considered as a way of thinking through a situation (Brooks 10) in everything from Platonic dialogues to contemporary films, we can begin to understand what students mean when they say that a good television program makes them think. It is not necessarily that the program makes them reflect on the quality of the *program* from traditional literary or rhetorical positions. Instead the program offers students a problem in the plot that, when resolved, provides them both with an emotional release and a way of thinking about broadly similar problems in their own *experience*. This explains why, when asked what a good program made them think about, students often turn to emotional commonplaces that connect the program with relevant situations in their own lives such as "never take your friends for granted" or "you have to stand up for what you believe in." The trick of a good program, given these values, is to provide this recognizable setting

and problem and, through the resolution of the problem, the familiar emotional commonplace, without making the problem or the resolution predictable.

This problem-solving function of plot is central to what Seymour Chatman calls the "traditional narrative of resolution." This is the kind of classical plot that Aristotle had in mind and is the stuff not only of myth and fairy tale, but of contemporary mainstream movies and television episodes. Contemporary literature, on the other hand, often operates within a "narrative of revelation" that is not interested in solving the problems of plot -- or even necessarily posing problems of plot in the first place. (48) Events are not convincingly resolved, either happily or tragically, instead the nature of the characters and the world they inhabit is revealed. Indeed, often in a narrative of revelation, not only are problems not solved in the end, but often, because of the revelation of character, problems may be further complicated. While in the narrative of resolution the sequence of events and how they allow the characters to solve the problem is central, in a narrative of revelation events may be important or may be minor. As Chatman notes, "Whether Elizabeth Bennet marries is a crucial matter, but not whether Clarissa Dalloway spends her time shopping or writing letters or daydreaming, since any one of these or other actions would correctly reveal her character and plight" (48).

As a consequence of this turn toward the narrative of revelation plot as an important area of study has diminished, if not disappeared. Even when teaching Jane Austen, the focus is more often on character or culture than what is considered to be the standard marriage plot. And though students may read for pleasure books that are constructed around problem-solving plots, and certainly watch movies and television programs that work the same way, English teachers try to make clear to them that reading for plot is a basic activity, something to be taken for granted in discussions of reading and writing, and not on an intellectual par with reading for deeper questions of character, symbolism, culture and so on. Peter Brooks notes that, "Plot has been disdained as the element of narrative that least sets off and defines high art -- indeed, plot is that which

especially characterizes popular mass consumption literature: plot is why we read Jaws, but not Henry James" (4). In terms of television, media critics and academics also often praise more highly the unusual programs that are closer to narratives of revelation. Twin Peaks, for example, a series that could rarely be accused of resolution, received high praise from critics and academics and was written about in a number of scholarly journals outside of the field of Communication -- including some in composition. Yet the series drew relatively small numbers of viewers, particularly as the initial problematic of who killed Laura Palmer continued to go unresolved.

Composition has often followed literature toward privileging the narrative of revelation in student writing. In personal essays, for example, it isn't enough for students to relate events and to provide a strong plot where problems are solved by the end of the paper. Students often produce such narratives in early drafts, but most writing teachers push the students toward revision. As Thomas Newkirk maintains, in the essays that are usually most valued in a composition course "the student writer needs to negotiate convincing 'turns' in the writing, shifts from rendering to reflection that point to the 'significance' (a key word in personal essay assignments) of the experience being rendered" (12). In other words, it is not the resolution of the plot that is important, but the revelation of the insights gained by the central character, in this case the student writer. The personal essay, as taught in many composition courses, is about more than the events experienced by the writer; the personal essay is about how those events are processed through the mind of the writer. Plot is not the key characteristic of personal essays in most composition anthologies or the goal of many assignments. Instead the emphasis in the personal essay as seen in many composition courses is the exploration of the writer's consciousness, as provoked by external events. Again, this highlights the difference between the exploration of interiors valued in academic print literacy and the exploration of surfaces valued in television.

Certainly I have told students in many composition courses that it is not the events themselves that are the most important part of their writing, but the meaning they make from those events as they reflect on them. In fact I have at times encouraged students to avoid writing about big events and problems and tried to structure assignments that would move them toward reflection and revelation. I have assigned essays for them to read that model this approach and often contain little in the way of linear events, conflicts, or clear resolutions of those conflicts. I see myself as not teaching them to write narrative scripts, but to write essays with a strong authorial presence. The idea that the exploration of interiors is important, and it is something that can usually be done more effectively in print, is an idea that many composition teachers take for granted. But it is not taken for granted by our students. Some of my students have been puzzled by my assignments that encourage them to focus on smaller events and interiors. They are resistant to writing about anything other than the "big" events of their lives --events that often can be described in cinematic thoroughness -- that can lead to satisfying resolutions that touch on emotional commonplaces.

This resistance and this desire to write heavily plotted narratives with little focus on authorial interiors is easier to understand if we consider that for many students there is much greater experience with narratives that privilege resolution of plot over revelation of character. This is particularly the case in films and television. All we have to do is think about the most popular films with younger people in recent years, such as Titanic, Star Wars Episode One: The Phantom Menace, or Saving Private Ryan, or the emphasis on plot resolution in a given episode of most television programs, as I discussed in Chapter One, to see the pervasive influence of this kind of plot or narrative. Even programs such as ER or the X-Files that may have ongoing plot lines, are always sure to resolve the central one of an episode clearly enough to satisfy the audience. It's also important to note that the plots of these popular movies or television programs are often quite well constructed and offer a substantial emotional impact at the end. Some television series even use the

importance of plot as an overt joke. Each episode of the sitcom Friends, for example, begins with the title "The One Where..."

Consequently when asked to write about the personal, it is not necessarily surprising that many students turn to a plot that will engage the reader in the conflict, avoid predictability, and lead to a resolution with an emotional impact that will touch on the emotional commonplaces in the reader's life. It is also not surprising that the same students are initially puzzled by many teachers' emphasis on smaller events, non-chronological writing, and the exploration of a central idea by the writer. I have heard many teachers over the years express their frustration with students who resisted assigned essays that offered little in the way of traditional plot or resisted teachers' encouragement to explore the interiors of their responses to events and ideas. I do believe that we want to help students to see the value in using print to explore interiors and to reflect and engage in analysis. I also believe that we can use the knowledge they possess about plot as one tool to get closer to that goal.

If students have a much greater immersion in narratives of resolution, and can articulate the qualities that comprise a compelling plot, what implications does this have for how we teach writing that values reflection and a strong authorial presence? Rather than dismiss their knowledge of plot conventions, I believe that we could use that knowledge, not only to reinvigorate the often-neglect intellectual discussion and analysis of plot, but also as a gateway into the discussion and analysis of other concepts such as character, reflection, culture, and voice and the use of the rhetorical "I". For example, if we open up a classroom discussion about the differences in narratives of resolution and of revelation we can help make students more aware of the ends they are pursuing in their writing. Or we could use television programs to engage in questions of conflicts in plot. How do we define and recognize real conflicts and those that are contrived circumstances? What roles do character, pacing, and voice have in making such determinations? What resolutions are fulfilling and how are those different from resolutions that are cheaply

moralistic or predictable? How does the genre of a program influence the way we read such resolutions? What then are the genre expectations of the personal essay? Of the analytical essay? How do plots on film and television, with an emphasis on dialogue and action, often differ from those in print where interior thoughts and reflections can be more easily rendered? Is desire the "motor" of narrative, as Brooks maintains (54) and how is that desire connected with issues of individual ideas and emotions or culture? (If students are at first confused about such a question, ask them about desire as the narrative motor in ER or Titanic and they will get it instantly.) Do characters on television shows remain the same one season to the next or do they change and grow? If the characters change, how does that interact with plot? If the characters do not change, how does that illuminate the differences in plot and character between the media of television and of print essays and stories?

Of course these are only a few general ideas about how to reclaim and work with plot in the teaching of writing and reading. What is most important is that, once again, we as teachers make the attempt to recognize in our students an area of knowledge that has too long been neglected or ignored. Rather than seeing students' emphasis on plot as only a weakness that must be remedied, we can choose to make students aware of what they do know, of where that fits in with what we are teaching in writing courses, and of how they can explore other areas of reading and writing, including the exploration of interiors, from that base of knowledge.

"We're Rebellious, But We Want to Make Money"

After we talked about the Futurama, I talked with the groups of students about the advertisements that ran during the program. The students had no trouble recalling the products being advertised and understanding the nature of the appeal being used to sell the ads. Well accustomed to the "flow" of television programming, the students easily adapted to the rhetorical shifts that occurred from program to ad and from one ad to the next. I

should note, however, that the students often engaged in conversations about the program, or other non-television topics, during the commercial breaks or mentioned to me that, were they watching at home or in their dorm rooms, commercial breaks would be their signal to reach for the remote and begin zapping or engage in some other activity such as looking at a magazine. Even the students who talked during some ads could usually recall what was being advertised. And advertisements that particularly caught the students' attention often stopped all conversation in the room.

One particular favorite of students, particularly the women in the groups, was a Special K cereal ad in which burly, middle-aged men, speaking to the camera, complain about their looks with phrases such as "I have to accept that I have my mother's thighs." The students said they liked the commercial both because it was funny and unexpected, but also because they liked its implicit commentary about the pressure on women to conform to a particular body image. Yet even as the students understood the implied critique in the ad, several also criticized the implied message advocated in the commercial. As Courtney said, "On the one had, there's a good underlying message that women shouldn't worry so much about how they look. But I think the real message is, 'Worry about it, but don't do it out loud. Just eat Special K and you'll look good."

Courtney's comment is representative of a common response of students to the television advertisements. Though students' first response usually regarded how entertaining they found the commercial, it was often quickly followed by pointed comments about the manipulative and coercive intent of advertisers. That in turn was often followed by a what seemed almost a standard statement denying the ability of advertisers to influence the students' behavior. The following exchange between Kevin and Etienne offers another example of this pattern of response.

Kevin said that he hated a KFC ad with an animated rapping Colonel Sanders: "I hate that KFC ad with that stupid Colonel Sanders trying to be hip. It's just ridiculous. It's not fun to watch at all."

"I know. It's an embarrassing ad," Etienne said. "But even with a stupid ad like that you do have to be aware that you are being manipulated."

"Well they try to manipulate you. I mean, I notice commercials, but I don't pay that much attention to them. They don't make me buy things," Kevin said.

"No, they don't make me buy things either," Etienne said.

This pattern of response occurred in each group and with few exceptions among the students. I don't see anything particularly surprising or unusual in this pattern of response. It does, however, offer an interesting place from which to consider students' abilities to identify audience on television, to recognize irony and its effect, and, most important, to consider the effect on students of having the most important and pervasive form of communication they encounter be one that is dedicated at its most fundamental level to the non-stop selling of commercial goods and services.

After we had watched Futurama we watched a series of six advertisements I had taped. The first three ads, for FedEx, Purina Cat Chow, and the Olive Garden Restaurant, were broadcast during an episode of ER on NBC. The next three commercials came from MTV and included ads for an upcoming MTV V-J contest to find a new on-air announcer, Coca-Cola, and Cotton products. My initial reasons for including these ads out of context was to see if students could identify the form and intended audience of each ad and, by extension, identify the probable context in which the ad took place. As I will illustrate, the students easily identified the ads by form and audience, but then almost always included the kind of critique and disavowal I mentioned above.

When I asked students to describe the audience they thought each set of ads were intended for, they did it quickly and accurately, using as evidence both the product being sold and the style of the ad itself. Jennifer, for example, said it was clear that the first three ads, the ones that had been broadcast during ER, were not targeted for younger people. "FedEx is for professional people. Cats are usually owned by people who are settled and the Olive Garden is a place you would go with your family. So these ads aren't for little

kids, but are on later at night for adults," she said. Irene agreed saying, "They must be for adults. Kids don't use FedEx or do the grocery shopping and they're not going to take their parents out to dinner."

The intended audience for the ads broadcast on MTV, on the other hand, was identifiable more through the style and form of the commercials rather than through the product being advertised. Bruce put it this way, "Those ads scream, 'MTV.' And that means it's for a younger audience. There are younger people in the ads and they have a younger attitude. People over thirty might look at the first ad (for the MTV V-J contest) and say 'I don't like the looks of that guy. I don't want to end up like that guy.'" And Courtney said that the Coca-Cola ad was clearly aimed at younger people because it centered around a boy, "who is a typical Gen X slacker and it's trying to appeal to us as slackers."

In terms of form, the harshest criticism came for the most conventional advertisement: the Purina Cat Chow ad. The students unanimously agreed that this traditional hard sell ad, consisting of a dancing cat, the name of the brand repeated several times, and a description of the added nutrients that made the Purina brand superior, was unimaginative and annoying. Kevin's comment was typical of many: "The cat chow ad exemplifies all that is bad with advertising. It showed no imagination. It just blasted the information at you. It was insulting. I just turn off ads when they do a hard sell like that."

The students spoke most positively about commercials that contained some sense of ironic humor or self-mocking. The students seemed to appreciate an implicit acknowledgment in the advertisement that it was trying to sell something and manipulate them to buy. The commercials that elicited the most positive responses were the FedEx ad, in which a staff person for a hockey team uses a competitor rather than FedEx and ends up shipping the Stanley Cup to Peru, the MTV V-J contest ad, in which a shabby looking person in an equally shabby apartment talks to the camera about winning the contest because he is representative of the MTV way of life, and the Cotton ad, in which a

montage of people of various ages and ethnic groups are shown in their underwear while the words, "Never Be Intimidated, Just Picture the Other Guy in His Underwear" appear on the screen.

"The FedEx ad tells you a story, and that will always be more interesting," Kevin said. "And then it gets the message across about what can happen if you rely on an inferior service and it exaggerates it with humor so it's fun to watch." Several other students echoed Kevin's preference for commercials with narrative structures. Narratives centered around a joke, like the FedEx ad were always preferred over narratives without a joke, such as the Olive Garden commercial about a father taking his family out to dinner. The Cotton ad was also popular among the students, both for the irony in the juxtaposition of the printed words with the images of all kinds of happy people in their cotton underwear, and for the style of a series of images set to music without a hard-sell sales message. Lynn said, "I love Cotton ads. I love those kinds of commercials. It's one of those ads that just relies on the music and pictures and a few words. Nike used to have ads like that. I think it's more effective because it catches your attention and makes you read the words." Irene agreed with Lynn, saying, "In the pictures the people are relaxed and they're all happy and the colors are warm and that is what they want you to think about cotton. It's a feeling, not a message that's important."

Perhaps the most interesting response, however, was to the MTV V-J commercial. The students who talked most favorably about this ad talked about the effect of its self-mocking, ironic approach. Peter said that the ad worked well to draw attention to the contest and to set the tone for what viewers would see:

> You're laughing at what this guy is saying. This down and out loser with the crooked teeth lives in this cramped, terrible, one-room apartment with eggshell green paint on the walls. And he is talking about doing what he wants whenever he wants to do it. And that's funny because you usually hear that comment from big rock stars. 'Oh, I do whatever I want to do.' And this guy is saying the same thing. It turns it all backwards. It takes the words and turns the meaning around on itself.

Peter recognized the essential ironic move taking place in the commercial. To take the words and turn their meaning around on themselves is a good working definition of irony. He was not alone in understanding how ironic comments worked in this commercial. Other students talked about the effect such an ironic commercial would have on audience members' perception of the contest. Consider this exchange between Bruce and Courtney:

"They're making fun of their own contest," Bruce said.

"But that way they already have protected themselves if nobody wants to do it because they call it a big joke. So if there's no turnout they can pretend it was a joke all along," Courtney said.

"Yeah, it's harder to criticize the contest when they've already criticized their own contest," Bruce said.

As I noted in Chapter One, television often assumes a self-reflexive, ironic stance that out-positions any attempt to criticize it. This is not a new idea among Communication and Media critics and theorists. What surprised me, and would probably surprise any number of writing teachers, is how clearly the students watching this commercial understood both the technique of irony and the effect intended by its use. I often see students employ the hip, ironic, cynical position that pervades popular culture in both their conversations and their writing. It is easy to see this as an attitude that students put on without any conscious sense of what they are doing other than conforming to the prevalent position of the culture and their peers. What is different in these students' discussions of this commercial is their clear recognition of irony as a rhetorical move. Though they might not have been able to give me a definition of the word "irony" had I asked, the students understood and could articulate that to take words and use them in a way so their meaning was opposite of their usual sense was the rhetorical move being made in the MTV commercial. The students also understood that the effect of such a move was to create a text that mocked its own pretensions. They understood that the ironic stance could be used as a way to pre-empt critique. Such comments from students

display more than a simplistic unthinking attitude; instead they display an understanding and awareness of language use and its effect on an audience that, even if not articulated in the critical language we immediately recognize or developed past their initial comments, is a place for writing teachers to begin engaging students in further discussions of the same issues.

These student comments about the MTV commercial raise two questions for me as a writing teacher. First, if students can identify the use and effect of irony on television commercials, could they also do so when reading it in print texts? This is a question the research for this project did not cover, but one that is worth pursuing in future work. My assumption, however, is that it would be more difficult for students to pick up written cues that would identify a work as ironic to a more experienced reader. As I noted in Chapter Three, because many students have less experience with reading print texts, and because print texts they have encountered in school settings such as textbooks have been presented to them throughout their K-12 education as repositories of truth and facts, they are as unaccustomed to looking for irony in print the way they do in television as they are in challenging the veracity of the print texts they are assigned in classes. The second, and more important, question is whether the students who can recognize and employ the ironic move in watching and commenting on television programs and commercials, can use that often quick but facile critical position as a place to begin a more thorough and thoughtful critique? In other words, can a well-honed sense of irony be used as the first step in teaching analysis and criticism? This is a question I will address more fully in the last chapter.

Although most of the students responded positively to some of the commercials as entertainment, they often also exhibited a strong and sharp thread of criticism about the purpose of commercials, including the commercials they enjoyed watching. This critique may be a result of effective media education programs in their previous schools, a result of having grown up in a more cynical and media-saturated world, or a combination of both.

For example, though Peter enjoyed the MTV ad, calling it "hilarious and a good way to catch people's attention," he also knew that the creators of the ad were making it, not as a form of entertainment, but as a way to make money. He said, "MTV is just this big corporation pretending that it's rebellious and cutting edge. Obviously some people watch it, but everyone knows it's part of a huge conglomerate. We're rebellious, but we want to make money." Peter's comments are similar to those of critic Elayne Rapping who says that "MTV, like all pop culture, is contradictory and shifty, pushed and pulled by the forces of reaction and progress" (172). Rapping points out that MTV, though certainly part of American corporate capitalism, has also had to respond to resistant and subversive movements in music, such as rap, and has succeeded in bringing those forms to a larger audience. (170). (That this allows the dominant culture to co-opt and commodify potential sources of resistance is one of the central paradoxes of popular culture.)

Karen is another example of a student who talked about enjoying some of the ads as entertainment, particularly the FedEx and Cotton commercials, but who could describe in detail the kind of critique she engaged in while watching television advertising. She said:

> I watch commercials carefully sometimes. I watch them sometimes to see if people are filling stereotypical gender roles. I hate dishwashing commercials so much. Why can't the guy be washing the dishes and the woman come in in her business suit? I also watch to see the number of minority faces in commercials. It's increased a lot. It's not like I'm doing research, but I notice. The Cotton ad did a pretty good mixture of races and ages.

These kinds of critical comments, displaying an acute awareness of the purpose of commercials on television and how audience members are expected to respond to those commercials, were common among the students I talked with. At the same time, the students were willing to watch and enjoy the commercials and rarely missed the message of an ad or the name of the product it was selling. When we hear critical comments from students about television, it is worth keeping in mind the ways in which they can both be sharply critical of what they are watching while, at the same time, finding it entertaining

and satisfying. They do not have any problems holding these seemingly oppositional ideas simultaneously in the way that Peter Elbow talks about embracing oppositions (180). This sense of simultaneous critique and enjoyment that students often exhibit when talking about television, whether advertising or programming, should also serve as a reminder that, though we should recognize their critical capabilities, we should not exaggerate their critical responses to what they watch on television. For all of us, and for these students, there can be a significant difference between the way in which we *read* a text and the way in which we *use* that text in our lives. This is a particularly important distinction in terms of television. It means that we may watch a program and be capable of understanding and criticizing it as a text, in terms of form, audience, irony and so on. Yet we may, at the same time, be completely swept along by its affective power. Just because we know that swelling music is manipulating the climax of a drama doesn't mean that it might not still bring tears to our eyes. In the same way, just because we know that a commercial is constructed in a particular way to try to encourage us to buy a product doesn't mean that the message about that product doesn't stick in our minds.

As researchers and teachers, then, it can be tempting to want to romanticize the students' critical readings of these commercials as always being forms of critique or resistance of popular culture (Buckingham and Sefton-Green158). We may see television as a medium to be resisted, filled as it is with sentimental, superficial programming in the service of selling advertising. We may see television as reinforcing dominant cultural values and stereotypes about race, class, and gender. And, seeing television in such a way, we may want to help our students understand this view of television and to develop critical reading and thinking skills that help them question such dominant ideologies instead of buying into them in an unthinking manner. Consequently, when students make critical comments about advertising or television programs, such as the ones I have noted in this book, it is easy to want to see such comments as a basis for a more intensive and far-reaching critique of the medium. The comments are indeed critical of what the students

are watching; but are the comments evidence of true critique, of resistance to the dominant cultural ideologies I mentioned above? As teachers and researchers we need to continually ask ourselves whether our interpretation of student comments as resistance is an interpretation the students themselves would recognize or accept. They may be more than willing to criticize a particular commercial or program and even to acknowledge that it is all put on the air to make money, but they may resist turning those individual criticisms into a more complicated critique of the culture in which many of them are quite comfortable and happy. In the face of such student comments as I have reported in this project, I have tried to keep in mind that my critical response to television, and to composition for that matter, that I have developed through a cultural studies approach, may not in fact reflect the responses of these students. I need to be careful about imposing my interpretation of these students as critical readers of television in a way that reflects more my response than theirs. And, in the classroom, I need to be aware of these different levels of criticism and not use differences in our readings as an excuse to bully students into my conception of resistance. As Paulo Freire, notes, "one has to respect the levels of understanding that those becoming educated have of their own reality. To impose on them one's own understanding in the name of their liberation is to accept authoritarian solutions as ways to freedom" (41). It means that success in the classroom is not the winning of the students over to my way of thinking, but is instead engaging in a dialogue about discourse and communication that helps students, and myself, to encounter different ideas about culture and resistance through which they can test their own conclusions.

For, at the same time the students I spoke with were critical of the intent of the commercials they watched, they were equally adamant that these ads they could quote, enjoy, and criticize, had no effect on them as audience members and consumers. Such remarks, made by students without a trace of irony, seem either naive or disingenuous. For students who are so media savvy in many ways, and who seem so conscious of the attempts of television advertisers to manipulate them into buying goods they don't need, it

is difficult at first to reconcile such adamant statements about the inability of commercials to influence their tastes and habits. To some extent this kind of comment I believe comes from the same developmental moment, the quest for identity for traditional-age first-year students, as their assertions that they are not influenced by their peers or their parents. There is also a tendency in talking about television, both to researchers and in the culture at large, to ascribe to others the inability to break free from the nefarious influence of the medium while maintaining an individual sense of independence. In terms of television, however, I also think that the commodification of commercial television in the US and its role in daily consumer culture is so complete that its influence on the audience as consumers is ubiquitous and invisible.

It seems almost redundant to talk about American television as an element of consumer culture. Not only is everything on commercial television commodified (as increasingly is much on so-called public television), but everything about television constructs the viewer as a consumer. Of course programming is judged a success or failure based on whether it is popular enough to encourage advertisers to place ads within its interruptions. Yet it is not simply that television programs are made to serve advertising, television programs are indistinguishable from advertising. The forms have changed over the years. Because individual programs are no longer sponsored single companies, no longer do Lucille Ball and Dezi Arnaz or Dick Van Dyke and Mary Tyler Moore step out of character to promote cigarettes, Phillip Morris and Kent respectively (even Fred Flintstone and Barney Rubble testified to the advantages of Winston cigarettes during the original prime-time run of The Flinstones) (McAllister 108). There continue to be infomercials that promote individual products and advertisements that use television program characters as salespersons, such as the characters from The Simpsons, the cultural critique of that series carefully removed, in advertisements for candy bars and doughnuts. More to the point, however, advertising has become such an integral part of the discourse of popular culture that its catch phrases and concepts have become the

content of programs. The characters on the sitcom Coach attempt to be in an advertisement based on the popular Taster's Choice coffee ads that were running at the same time (Andersen 254). The characters on Seinfeld speak in brand names and advertising catch-phrases about Snapple drinks or Junior Mint candies. "Just as products have become the stuff of everyday life, advertising associational language has become the word-play of TV discourse" (257).

Of course the commodification of information is not restricted only to television. Publishing is a commercial enterprise. The books that we use only will be published, even by university presses, if the publishers estimate that they will sell an adequate number of copies. Corporate financing continues to make inroads into universities and the pressure on colleges and universities to further commodify and professionalize the educations they offer continues apace. Yet the intertextuality of advertising and programming allows the characters on television programs to repeat the advertisements even as they create an ironic resistance to their message. Nonetheless, the message is repeated. This creates on television what McAllister calls a "seamless environment" in which the commodification of the culture occurs without interruption (257). The students who simultaneously enjoy, comprehend, and criticize commercials are part of that environment. That all commercial television revolves around advertising and is intended to sell products is not news to the students I talked with. The result of their exposure to and awareness of this commercial environment of television often seems to be a cynicism about the ends of communication in general. For some of these students there seems to be a constant wariness of any form of communication. They question the motives of the communication and wonder how they might be being manipulated.

There are ways in which the cynicism that arises from the commercial environment of television is noticeable in the writing classroom. Perhaps the most overt influence comes from the occasional student complaint about a course or assignment that begins with the phrase "I paid for this course...." This attitude, that payment of tuition should

offer students control over the content of the course, reflects the sense that the teacher is a service worker responding, after payment, to the demands of the consumer. Certainly the perception by many in the academy, from administrators to faculty to students, that first-year composition is nothing more than a "service course" only increases this attitude in some students. It also helps explain the frustration some students feel in having to complete assignments they do not feel respond to the instrumental demands of such a service course or to their demands as paying consumers. (After all, if they had paid for cable they could zap away from programs they didn't like.) Again, this is an attitude toward first-year composition courses that can be as prevalent among faculty and administrators as it is among students. Those caught in the middle, in first-year composition classes, are all too often graduate students and non-tenured faculty with little power to respond effectively to any of these constituencies.

The more interesting conflict, however, is also the more subtle. Even the best television programs on commercial television are, in the end, broadcast as a means of getting viewers to watch the advertisements between program segments. The students I spoke with and watched television with all understood that selling advertising time is the motor that drives commercial television and that programs are made as entertaining as possible to keep viewers eyeballs on the screen until the commercials come on. As a number of students said, the focus of a television series is to keep viewers watching week after week, insuring the advertisers a reliable audience to which to sell their products. There may be art or entertainment on the screen and that may be what lures viewers to the television set, but behind it all is always the drive by advertisers to reach consumers.

In the university classroom, on the other hand, the presumptions of the faculty tend to work in the other direction. Students may be there because they paid tuition, which in turn goes to help pay the instructor's salary; there is a financial relationship present in the classroom. and many college teachers would acknowledge that relationship and their place in late-capitalist consumer culture. Yet the intent of the college course, faculty would

maintain, is not to keep students entertained until they can be sold a product -- unless one defines that product as knowledge. In other words, the ends sought by faculty in the classroom are supposed to be abstract notions of knowledge, enlightenment, critical thinking, or whatever else faculty choose to call it at the moment. Indeed many faculty complain about feeling they must "sell" students in the classroom on learning instead, as if they were in the entertainment business. They complain that students do not seem interested in the higher calling of the search for learning and knowledge, but seem instead to want to be sold a product that will be useful to them. Again, this can be a particularly sharp area of conflict between students and the teacher in a writing classroom where students expect to be taught writing skills they can use while faculty may want to teach writing and reading as enriching, critical thinking experiences. The teacher's frustration at the students' desire to be entertained is often met by students' cynicism that there is a manipulative agenda behind the information being offered. They are wary of being duped in class just as they are wary of being duped by television.

Part of what can be done to address this conflict is to bring to the writing classroom a cultural studies critique that continually looks at the material conditions that construct and constrain knowledge and discourse -- both in popular culture and the academy. If we talk with students about form or audience or time or intent in terms of television programming, we should also make clear how the commercial nature of the medium influences what is created and broadcast. We should discuss how the need to keep viewers eyeballs on the screen necessitates that programs are built around advertising needs. And we should talk about how television as a medium helps construct and maintain the relations of power that dominate our culture. (I outline some specific approaches on how to incorporate such ideas into a writing course in the next chapter.) This does not mean we should necessarily expect students to reject wholesale a system and medium they find comforting, a sense of authority over, and highly pleasurable. We should be helping them find a critical position from which to view television as a way of making them better

readers of it and the culture that creates it, understanding that they will not always want to assume such a critical position.

At the same time we should also be talking about how the material and commercial conditions of higher education influence the kind of print texts they will be asked to read and write in their courses. Just as we discuss the cultural forms and social practices that define television. we should be examining how the writing classroom is constructed as a cultural form and social practice. What are the purposes and goals toward which we teach and how are those situated within the dominant cultural ideology? How does composition's position within the academy -- its standing often as a "service" course, its connection to professionalizing student writing, and its purpose of assimilating students into mainstream academic discourse -- shape its philosophies and pedagogies? With our students, and among ourselves as teachers, we should be considering the social conditions in composition that privilege certain print literacies and texts and deny the entrance of others such as television. We should welcome students into our professional conversations about the teaching of writing and help them understand what is at stake in such conversations. We should talk openly with our students about the role of power and class in the teaching of composition and its place in higher education. Again, the goal in these conversations should not be to indoctrinate students into a particular political point of view. Instead, in all of these situations, a cultural studies perspective will help students understand the construction of discourses and the constraints that will impose on their writing. It is such a familiarity with the possibilities and constraints of writing that will truly empower students to make the best decisions possible about how they communicate with others in writing.

The Image Over the Word

The final piece of television I watched with the students was a ten-minute segment from the British television series, The Singing Detective. One of the great works of

television art, the six-hour series, written by Dennis Potter, is an example of how good a television series can be.[3] It is anything but a conventional narrative, however. In the ten-minute segment I watched with the students a little boy rides on a train in England with his mother and a group of soldiers near the end of the Second World War. But within the ten minutes the narrative flashes backward and forward in time; the point of view moves in and out of the boy's thoughts as both a child and a grown man; the setting changes among the train, the train platform, and a hospital ward; the train passes the same scarecrow several times, and the boy imagines the scarecrow first waving to him and then turning into Hitler and being destroyed; and the soldiers and others burst in and out of song. I wanted the students to watch this segment, out of context, to see how well they could "read" a complicated television text in one viewing.[4]

As I had suspected, the students had little trouble reading the segment and interpreting the events. Even students who said, initially, that the segment was weird and that they didn't get it, could identify the setting, the mood, and the essential plot elements such as the boy and his mother leaving the boy's father. What I found more impressive, however, was that a number of the students could also identify both larger thematic elements of the series (a man, ill in a hospital, reflecting on the pain of his childhood, or the cost of trust and betrayal) and the cinematic devices used to advance the plot or reveal the themes. They understood, for example, that when the soldiers began singing it was a song that reflected the boy's anxieties about his mother's relationship with his father. Or they could explain that the end of a flashback was signaled by a closeup of the boy's face and then a fade to an establishing shot of the hospital ward.

This facility to read complex television texts, given students' deep experience with such texts, should not be surprising. Indeed, others have noted similar responses to student readings of complex film narratives, such as Pulp Fiction (Wild 26). It is important to consider how the students read the segment I watched with them, however. In watching The Singing Detective, as with the advertisements they watched, more of their reading and

interpretation came from the images on the screen rather than the music or words. When I asked them how they had been able to figure out what was going on in the scene, all of the students began by talking about what they had seen and recounting the images quite accurately for having only had one chance to view them. I then asked them if they thought such a scene could be rendered as effectively in print. Courtney's response was typical:

> We see the boy. We see exactly what he looks like at the same time we're looking at the scenery at the same time we're looking at the inside of the train and we're getting all that information at once. If you were writing something and trying to explain exactly how the boy and the landscape looked it would take at least a page.

Kevin's response was similar and also echoed the concerns about time covered in Chapter Three. He said, "It would take lots of words to create that picture and the scenes jump through so many different things so quickly it would be hard to describe it in words. It would take so many pages to describe it in a book." The capacity of images to present layers of information simultaneously, as opposed to the word-by-word linear nature of print was a common thread of student comments. They both liked the opportunity to receive those layers of information that they could get through images and were able to decode and process the layers quickly and accurately. They characterized the ability to read these images as an "easier" form of reading than dealing with print texts. Bruce said, "The visual is easier. You can see it all and see it all at once. It would be harder to do the same thing in writing." Irene's comment was similar, "You can get so much information from a picture at a glance. Description in a book takes so long that when you finally get back to the story you're lost."

All of these student responses are yet another reminder that, though television is filled with words both spoken and written, it is the moving image that is central to the experience of television for most people. So many of the points of conflict between television viewing and composition classrooms as social practices I mentioned in the last chapter are connected with the primacy of the image on television. It is the ability to fill images with layers of information and juxtapose them in rapid, associative edits that can

lend television its sense of speed, particularly in forms such as advertising, news, and music videos. It is the ability of television to present the illusion of "seeing for yourself" that imbues it with its sense of liveness, objectivity, and authority for many viewers, including the students I spoke with. It is the sense of seeing through the "window" of the television screen that allows it to present material as if there were no clear authorial presence.

The element of television's reliance on images that I have not discussed, however, is the way in which students and others watching television process information in rapid associative patterns, rather than linear. While watching television or film, a viewer is able to read layers of information in each shot quickly. In a sense, the viewer can get more levels of information more quickly in a given shot than the viewer could get reading print on a page one word at a time. When that shot is juxtaposed with other images, electronic visual media allow for vast amounts of information to be delivered in rapid associations that offer the viewer messages about the relationships between the images. If we are watching the television we learn to read those associations and make meaning out of the juxtapositions. Each image is read or judged by the image next to it. One of the most famous examples of this remains the experiment by Soviet filmmaker Lev Kuleshov who took the same piece of film of a man's face and edited it with three different shots, a woman in a coffin, a girl with a teddy bear, and a bowl of soap. Audiences shown the film responded that the man did a fine job of acting happy about the bowl of soup, sad about the dead woman, and hungry about the bowl of soup. The so-called Kuleshov effect then, maintains that each shot will be invested with meaning by the audience depending on the shots surrounding it (Stephens 102). One example of this that Karen noted when watching the commercials for this project was that, in the Cotton ad, where all of the people portrayed were in their underwear, juxtaposing fit young men and women with images of toddlers and older people diffused the sexual nature of an ad focusing on underwear.

On the one hand this may seem no different from the way we make meaning of each word in a sentence depending on the words surrounding it. The difference is that each image can offer layers of information at much greater speed, and, some would argue, also much greater superficiality, than the words on a page. For example, Sarah Kozloff points out the ease with which television uses techniques such as parallel montage to convey simultaneous events, even in forms as short as a sixty-second advertisement. She notes that a United Airlines commercial -- showing a female business executive dropping her daughter off at daycare, flying to a meeting in another city, and returning home in time to pick her daughter up at the end of the day -- is done with twenty-six shots that cut back and forth from the mother's day and the daughter's. Though there is narration about the reliability of the airline, the story of the mother and daughter is told entirely through the intercut images (85-86). As a viewing culture we are comfortable with this kind of parallel montage and can easily follow the narrative of the commercial. Even longer narratives, films such as Titanic or Star Wars Episode One: The Phantom Menace, use sophisticated parallel cutting, often with rapid cuts from one scene to the next, often of shots that last less than a second. For contrast, even the fastest scenes of action-oriented movies of a generation ago have many fewer shots and cuts and more extended dialogue (Gleick 54-55). Though popular contemporary films themselves are often, in the end, linear narratives, within the films there are often shifts of time and place and rapid associative cuts that rely on the viewer to process the complex images quickly. Other critics such as David Marc maintain that "montage reigns as the vital aesthetic feature of American popular culture" and that other narrative forms that do not usually use montage, such as the novel or the argumentative essay or debate, are becoming increasingly marginalized in the culture at large (131). Indeed, the montage of rapidly edited images is familiar to most members of our culture in the same way that, more than a century ago, most people would have been familiar with the genre and form of the lecture or sermon. Students today have

much less experience with is the lecture, still a popular way of delivering information in higher education, or the dialogic discussion.

The quick cuts and associative juxtapositions in the commercials produced no problems for the students with whom I watched television. The Olive Garden and Cotton commercials, for example, both thirty seconds long, had numerous shots in them -- fourteen in the Olive Garden and thirty in the Cotton commercial. Some of the shots were less than a second in length. Yet when I asked the students if they had any trouble following such rapid editing they all said that they did not. Karen said, "It doesn't bother me. I'm used to the little flashes of images." And Etienne said the quick editing and multiple images were essential to the way the message was being presented; they were what made the commercial comprehensible. "You could turn off the sound and could get them all, you could understand them all," he said. "They tell you things with pictures on the screen so that would be easy to figure out."

The students I talked with, however, had rarely encountered print texts that attempted any similar kinds of shifts of time or use of associative forms. They considered print to be a form for linear, chronological narratives. The books they talked about having in read in school, Dickens, Twain, Harper Lee, or they ones they read for themselves, such as Stephen King and John Grisham, conform to this kind of linear form and narrative. No student mentioned ever reading a book by an author such as Toni Morrison or Salman Rushdie that would challenge such linear forms. The students I spoke with exemplified the kind of thinking Mitchell Stephens describes when he writes, "Print enforces a certain kind of logic: one-thing-at-a-time, one-thing-leads-directly-to-another logic, if/then, cause/effect -- the logic most of us have internalized" (78-79). Jennifer, in talking about the clip from The Singing Detective, compared the difference with print this way: "If you're moving through time, and not going chronologically like you do in books, it's easier if you can do it with visuals." Irene agreed and said that the amount of visual information available in each shot meant that movement in time and space was easier in film or

television. "You could do it in print, but it would take more work from the author and from the person having to read it," she said.

Several of the students also said that the visual nature of television provided them with a more direct, emotional experience than they could get through print. Julie said that seeing things on the screen helped her experience them immediately and more directly, but that emotions in print were always more detached and took longer to understand. She added that she liked to experience the way television helped her to experience emotions. Other students made similar comments about the immediacy of affect available in an image that they would not experience in the act of reading and processing words one at a time. They described print as being more removed from the action or emotion of what was being described.

It is the printed word, however, and not the image that is the coin of the realm in academics. Even in fields that rely heavily on images, such as art history or engineering, the visual elements are incomplete without printed words. Again, although there may be exceptions, it is the linear, detached, critical analysis or argument in print that is practiced in most scholarly journals and expected of many student assignments across many disciplines. As I noted in the Introduction, there are no shortages of examples of academics who decry the rise of the image, see it as evidence of simplistic or naive thinking, and question the utility or even the possibility of visual literacy.

When I have presented some of the material for this project to other faculty, including some of the commercials I have shown students, some of the faculty complain about not being able to follow the rapid cuts the students read so easily. When I mention how facilely the students could read the rapid, associative sets of images, more than one faculty member described such an ability as "scary." Such a response has left me wondering about the source of their professed fear. Does it reflect their sense that their students have an ability that they cannot comprehend? Is it a fear that the students' proficiency in this visual electronic literacy must, by some odd necessity, preclude a

proficiency in the literacy of "academic" print? Or is it a sense that the discursive ground is shifting under their feet? There is not doubt that communication and the definition of literacy is, in fact, shifting within the academy at large. Faculty offices that a decade ago were equipped only with telephones now contain personal computers with e-mail and Internet access. Many faculty now face students who display much greater ease and expertise with computers and new forms of media technology and communication. Such shifts in how knowledge is generated and communicated cannot help but create a sense of anxiety for many in higher education. Even as I try to keep abreast of new technologies and forms of communication, I still often feel as if I am knee deep in fast water, and doing all I can just to keep my balance and not be swept away. It is folly to reject all other forms of literacy than academic print texts, just as it is folly to embrace every form of communication as equal to all tasks. What is important to admit to ourselves, and to each other, are the sources of such anxieties about the media literacies of our students and ourselves. It is important to realize that forms of communication and discourse are changing. And it is important to realize that we must either engage with such forms, and critique and evaluate them, or be left further behind by our students and the culture at large.

I was curious as to whether the students in this project, who were able to read the segment of The Singing Detective quickly and easily, would be able to do the same with a piece of print writing that also moved back and forth in time and place. I chose a section, as with the television program out of context, from the Annie Dillard essay, "Total Eclipse."[5] This is an essay that often shows up in first-year composition anthologies and is one, in fact, that I have assigned to students over the years. I like it in large part because of the way Dillard connects the large and small events surrounding the viewing of a solar eclipse with reflections on mortality and control and because of the ways Dillard plays with form and style and avoids a linear, chronological narrative.

As I had suspected, and as had sometimes happened when I had assigned this essay in class, the students had a much harder time reading it with the same level of comprehension as they displayed with the television segment. They were less able to identify what was happening, the major ideas of the essay, or the techniques Dillard was using and why she was using them. They were also restless with her descriptions, which were not particularly lengthy, and her internal reflections and digressions.Nor could the students identify the genre of a work such as Dillard's essay, which means that they could not identify expectations of what might happen within such a genre. This is in contrast to their immediate understanding of genre when watching television.

One of the more interesting observations was that many of the students did not pick up the contextual and transitional cues that Dillard used with the same ease that they understood similar cues in the television clip. For example, students who could identify the camera work that indicated a flashback or flashforward on the screen, often missed, what to me were obvious written cues Dillard used. The section the students read begins with a reflection on waking and death. Out of context it would be impossible to know that it came from an essay about an eclipse. In the next paragraph, however, Dillard writes "It was the day of a solar eclipse in central Washington, and a fine adventure for everyone" (109) and follows that sentence with a scene of spectators discussing what the eclipse looked like. Yet more than half of the students missed that statement, and said that they only understood that Dillard had observed an eclipse much later in the section when she describes it in more detail.

Neither Dillard's language nor her syntax is particularly difficult in this essay, but the students I talked with did not seem to have had the kind of experience with reading complex print texts, particularly ones that focused on reflection and on associative, non-linear forms to be able to read her work with confidence and depth. As Etienne said, "It takes some getting used to when it (writing) moves around in and out of reality. You have to have read things like that before to understand it this time." In general the students

were, by the end of the section, able to explain that the essay was about having seen a solar eclipse. Yet most of them did not know what to do with Dillard's reflections on control and death. In these reflective sections Dillard uses analogies and metaphors about mining, deep-sea diving, and general anesthesia, among others (110-111). Most of the students were confused by these metaphors and analogies and couldn't connect them with her descriptions of the eclipse. Again, contrast this with their ability to understand why soldiers on a train in The Singing Detective might, in a child's imagination, start singing the song "Paper Doll." It is not only an unfamiliarity with the use of metaphors in print that the students found difficult in Dillard, but is also an unfamiliarity with the way she is using her authorial presence. It is Dillard's exploration of interiors, her use of the rhetorical "I" as a way of investing the work with meaning that was particularly confusing to them.

It is just such an exploration of interiors, just such a display of the writer's rhetorical "I", just such an authorial presence that writing teachers are often seeking in student writing. We want our students, if writing personal essays, to take that moment to reflect and to make the internal "turn" that will provide meaning for the events that they are describing. We want that step back into a more detached and overt reflection or analysis of a single mind. And that is precisely the nature of print that can be among the most unfamiliar and confusing to students who have much more experience with the authorless world of television than with the world of print literature.

One of the easiest, and also most productive, things we can do concerning writing students and television is in addressing this question of image and word. We should acknowledge to students, not only that they have an advanced and sophisticated visual literacy, but, just as important, that there are ways in which the potential of television, and film, to use and manipulate images allows it to do thing that cannot be equaled in print. As Mary noted in one of the sessions, "Books allow more time for people to do things, but films give more texture of what you see at any moment." Students will often tell us this in terms that seem more resistant and defensive. They will say something along the lines of,

"I'd rather see the movie than read the book, it's easier to get." When I have run into a comment like these a further conversation with the student often reveals that, along with feeling anxious about not understanding the printed work, the student often feels there is a binary he or she must respond to. There is print, and there is the moving image on television or in film. And a surprising number of students say that they feel compelled to rank one medium as superior to the other. Though they understand that there is greater cultural capital in the academy in the printed word, they often find that their needs of plot and emotion as well as their greater wealth of experience is in the visual media. (I'm always surprised at how surprised students in my classes are when I tell them how many of the faculty in the English department are movie fanatics.)

I am convinced that if we can do something as simple as destroy this binary for students, and explain why it is unnecessary, we could lower student resistance to the printed word and provide them with a clearer sense of why we, in the academy, value it. We need to let them know that we agree with Mary, film and television can provide more layers of information more rapidly than the printed word. We need to acknowledge that television and film offer a speed of information that print can't match. We need to acknowledge that there is a value and skill in both creating and reading rapidly intercut, associative images. We need to acknowledge that television provides an immediacy, a sense of liveness, and often an emotional impact that print can't match. And we need to let them know that we're not going to pretend that we can do things better with print when we, and our students, know that we can't.

At the same time we need to be more explicit about what print can do that cannot be found in images. Too often I think it is easier to begin a writing course by assuming that the students share the same sense of the benefits of print as the teacher, a long-time reader and writer long ago convinced of those benefits. I try, in my teaching to be clear about what is available in print that is not available in the image. I talk about the advantages of reflection, of exploring interiors, of stepping back for analysis, of slowing

down to let thoughts emerge and be refined, of asking and answering questions while reading or writing. These are important functions of thought that can usually be performed more effectively in print.

As an illustration it is easy to choose any piece of breaking news. I make it clear to my students that if there is an important piece of breaking news, I will try to find a television set because television can offer me the speed and immediacy I desire. After the initial story is over I will both read the newspaper for a more organized and detailed account of what happened and perhaps watch television analysis programs, such as Nightline or the Newshour for the same reasons. Here again I try to point out the advantages of the spontaneous give-and-take of the television programs as well as the advantages of the greater amount of information a newspaper can fit in its pages when compared with a television program. Finally, if I am interested in understanding the reasons behind the event, I will wait until more thoughtful books or extended magazine pieces can be written. For it is in the form of print that the writers, and I, will have both the space and time to explore and reflect on what happened and why. In this way I can try to fulfill the essential human desire of trying to make some sense of the world around me.

As John Ellis points out this is not unlike what television itself does with important news stories -- moving from live coverage, to regular news programs, to analysis programs, to popular chat programs, often where average people get to comment on the events. Ellis maintains that in an age of information overload, "we have very little idea how to come to terms with what we know. Television's process of working-through is currently one of the principle ways of coming to terms with what we know" (58). His metaphor of "working-through" comes from the field of psychoanalytic therapy. Although I agree with Ellis in identifying the process on television, I part with him in the classroom by maintaining that, just as print cannot compete with television when the news breaks, television is actually not as well-equipped for deep and detailed reflection and analysis as print. Also, rather than identifying the process as similar to psychotherapy, I try to make

the connection for students between the way news stories are processed on television and the way the writing process can work. In writing, just as with a breaking news story, we often move from rough ideas toward trying to find more information to answer our questions, to an initial organization of ideas, and finally to a deeper reflection and analysis of the facts and events and ideas we have uncovered. The difference, I tell my students, is that on television others are asking the questions and doing the writing for you. In the writing classroom the questions, answers, and writing will belong to them.

I do not claim that such a simple analogy works miracles. Yet I do think that we must acknowledge for our students the differences between how images and printed words work and where their strengths and weaknesses lie. I also think we need to think more carefully about the interplay between works and images that current technology is making easier every day. This is an issue I will address in Chapter Five.

Class, Students, and Available Literacies

As I conducted and reviewed the research I collected for this project I attempted to be aware of how differences in class might be manifesting themselves among the students I worked with. The University of New Hampshire, like the state itself, is not a particularly diverse community in terms of race and ethnicity. In terms of class, however, there are often significant distinctions in any given classroom. Some students will come from wealthy Boston or southern New Hampshire suburban communities, while others may come from small, depressed former mill towns and logging communities in the northern part of the state. The students participating in this project reflected just such a range. Some of the students came from families where the parents had high-paying and high-status professional jobs -- physicist, corporate executive, newspaper owner, -- others had parents with blue-collar or clerical jobs -- town mechanic, bank teller, factory worker, firefighter, teacher's aide -- and the rest had parents with white-collar service jobs of varying levels of training and pay -- pre-school teacher, car salesman, secretary.

In considering these class distinctions I was surprised to find relatively little variation among the programs the students reported watching. The same programs -- The Simpsons, The X-Files, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Dawson's Creek, ER, 90210 -- came up in conversations with students across the class spectrum. There were relatively few differences in viewing preferences that seemed connected with social class.[6] Nor did class seem to be the determining factor in the amount of television students were currently watching or had watched in high school.

Where class differences became clearer was in discussions of childhood viewing habits and in the amount of exposure to print, both writing and reading, in the home as younger children. Students whose parents held professional jobs reported that their parents placed strict limits on the amount of television they watched and which programs they were allowed to tune in. Students whose parents held working-class jobs reported fewer restrictions on their television viewing. An additional factor in some of the working-class families were children who, because both parents had to work, were latch-key children who had more unregulated television time to themselves. In a similar breakdown, students from the working-class families reported having had fewer books, magazines, and newspapers in the house and having been read to less by their parents. These are rather crude generalities generated from the information reported to me by the students. This project was not designed to provide more extensive data and analysis of class influences on reading and television viewing practices. There has been extensive work on class and reading and class and television watching that I will not try to replicate here. Nonetheless, I see the class differences reported by the students to be important in how it influences their other comments to me, and how I, in turn, respond to their comments. As I will explain, this dynamic has implications for how we respond to students in the writing classroom.

The differences in the amount of television and reading students experienced did not seem to have any effect on the ability of the students to read and interpret what they

saw on television. There seemed to be no class-based differences in their capacities to watch television with a complex interpretive eye. What was different, however, was the way students from different class backgrounds expressed their responses to me. This difference, I believe, resulted from the broader range of literacy experiences possessed by students from middle and upper class families. These other literacy experiences included the more extensive print literacy experiences that count as cultural capital in higher education.

For example, Peter and Karen, who both came from affluent families where television had been limited and reading and writing encouraged, tended to respond to my questions about television and writing in ways that were more familiar to the setting of an English teacher's office. Both the content and the terminology they used drew from experiences with literary reading and criticism. They would talk more about "form," "character," "tone," as well as discuss the cultural implications of the production and consumption of television in detached, analytical statements that would strike most college teachers as literate and insightful. Karen, as I noted above, talked about watching commercials for evidence of cultural stereotypes. And Peter often criticized in detail the derivative nature of the writing on television shows, such as this representative comment from Chapter Two:

> Two Guys, A Girl, and a Pizza Place. This is one of the most generic shows on TV. How many millions of times has that thing been done? A bunch of slackers sitting around a pizza place or coffee shop and they just sit there and talk back and forth and have the same subplots repeated week after week like "Oh, so-and-so has a relationship and the other person doesn't want to have the relationship." It's old and boring.

Both Peter and Karen rarely responded to my questions with purely affective responses. This is consistent with the kind of critical positions middle-class children are taught to assume from elementary school on (Dyson, Writing Superheroes, 181).

Students from working-class families, such as Julie, Kevin, or Courtney, were no less adept or critical in their viewing, but often did not approach their comments through the lens or terminology of literary or cultural criticism. Instead, I would often have to re-phrase questions about "form" or "style" for them because we did not share the same critical language. Once I would re-phrase the question, however, the content of their comments was often as insightful, but also often used a different set of terms and positions to express the insights. When, as I described in Chapter Two, I re-phrased the question about the form of television programs to Kevin to ask about a "basic episode of the X-Files," his initial response was to say he didn't think there was one -- and then to describe the form in detail. Even after his description was over, it was necessary for me to point out to him that the program did have a form and it was something that he could recognize and describe.

Also, when making critical comments about television these students often did not assume the more detached, analytical tone and position that Peter and Karen did; instead their comments moved more fluidly between criticism and analysis and emotional and sentimental responses. When Julie talked about the sitcom Friends, for example, her comments contained both criticism and emotional response:

> Right now it is all about Monica and Chandler and how they're trying to keep their relationship a secret, which is something that's funny because we've all been in that situation before. But now finally everyone is figuring out they're together and that is the whole basis for the shows. Everyone knows now and that can be pretty hilarious. I love to see the looks on their faces as they figure it out. Like at the end of the latest episode Ross, her brother, finds out. In the last scene he sees them through the window and he's standing outside screaming, but you don't know what he's going to do so you want to watch next week. They always end things that way so you'll want to know what will happen next. I mean that's the whole point, to keep you watching next week so the show can go on.

When you compare Julie's comment with Peter's above you notice that Julie both weaves in her emotional responses -- "I love to see the looks on their faces" and "that can be pretty hilarious" -- and connects the program to her own emotional experiences -- how the

current plot line "is funny because we've all been in that situation before." Yet there is analysis in her comment at the end when she notes that the point of the series is to keep viewers coming back week after week and that, in turn, influences the way the program is constructed. Peter's comment, on the other hand, contains evaluative comments -- "it's old and boring" -- but not comments about emotional responses or any connection to his own experiences. Julie also uses the first-person to talk about her emotional responses to the program, but changes to the second-person when her comments move to analysis. Peter, meanwhile, constructs his response with from a detached position, without the use of first- or second-person pronouns, in which each statement stands on its own as an authoritative truth. These brief examples are representative of the kinds of differences I noted in the responses of the affluent and the working class students.

It may at first be tempting to look at the difference in these responses and assume that the students reared in affluent families view television through a lens of print literacy and that the working-class students view television and print through a lens of television literacy. I see the difference as more complicated and more subtle however. I think it is impossible to know which literacy develops first and if one is employed as a kind of default literacy through which other forms of communication are filtered and interpreted. Instead I think the difference in the comments illustrates an experience with and understanding of the conventions of academic print literacy on the part of the affluent students, but, just as important, the recognition by those students of the institutional setting in which the interviews were taking place and my presence as a teacher as the audience to which they were speaking. Peter and Karen understood the kind of responses that are expected in an academic setting more fully than Julie, Kevin, and Courtney did and had been more fully socialized in how to respond to an English teacher's questions. Anne Haas Dyson points out that children from economically and socially privileged backgrounds learn, from their parents and their teachers, the social and aesthetic tastes of the academic world. "Those of more privileged social classes may tend to align themselves

accordingly in official school settings, offering opinions (acceptable to the institution) -- although in unofficial places they may offer very different points of view" ("On Reframing Children's Words" 357).

As Pierre Bourdieu notes in a study that involved showing the same photographs to people from different classes, the further up the class ladder the researchers went, the less the respondents talked about the affective power of the image and the more they talked about the form of the image (Distinction. 44-47). As I discussed in Chapter One, the elite culture that still dominates in higher education is one that expects students to learn to remove themselves from their affective responses and to learn to search for and exhibit more abstract, theoretical responses. Karen and Peter had already internalized this position and the ability to express their views in ways acceptable to the academy. They also both spoke about print and television with a clear sense of confidence in their opinions and criticisms, as noted in Peter's comment above and Karen's comment about analyzing commercials. Courtney, Kevin, and Julie, on the other hand, did not always maintain the detached analytical position. Also, though they spoke about television with confidence in their affective responses, they often felt the need to qualify their more critical statements. Kevin prefaced several of his remarks with comments such as, "I'm not like a TV critic or anything" and Julie answered a number of questions by first saying, "Well, I guess so" and then further elaborating on her ideas. And, when it came to discussing print texts, their comments, and those of other working-class students often displayed either a lack of confidence or resistance and resentment. Courtney, when talking about writing, said, "I think I can have good ideas but I get screwed up. I have lots of problems with organization and stuff. But writing can be a pain in the butt because I don't want to write, but I have to for the grade." This can be compared to the confidence in Karen's comment about knowing that "writing can be hard work, but if you put the work in it's worth it. I like writing metaphorically. It may not necessarily be easy for my reader

to relate to at first because it can be too metaphorical or abstract, but I like to take the ideas and develop them."

As I listened to the tapes of my interviews with these students, I found that I responded to Peter and Karen with a more sophisticated set of follow-up questions, in their wording and assumptions. I might, for example, ask them a question about narratives of resolution or revelation, feeling confident they would understand the concept. For the working-class students I often responded more like a teacher, including instruction in more basic terms and ideas such as form, style, and resolution, as I framed my follow-up questions. What was all the more troubling, however, was my sense, immediately following the interviews of how insightful and valuable the professional-class students had been and how much less useful the working-class students had been. For example, in Julie's comment about Friends above, during the interview I missed the analytical statement about the nature of series television at the end of the comment. It was only on listening to the tapes that I realized there was less difference in the quality of the student insights about television -- not about print -- than I had initially thought. The only difference was in which students were more articulate in ways that were familiar to me and gave me what I thought I wanted and which students took more work and reflection on my part to recognize the nature of their insights.

The most troubling implication of this for me is to consider how I would have responded to these same students, discussing the same issues, in a classroom setting where I do not have the luxury of reviewing tapes. I consider myself to be a teacher open to the potentially useful influences of television literacy in a writing class. Yet I have to wonder about what happens to students in writing courses whose primary literacy is television and who don't have the print literacy experiences that allow them to take the critical positions and use the critical terminology we value.

As I discussed in Chapter One, the first-year composition course has often seen its mission not simply as ignoring popular culture, but as actively working to move students

away from their engagement with popular culture. The values that dominate popular culture in general and television programming in particular -- pleasure, sentimentality, emotion, narrative, and so on -- are also often constructed by elite culture as being either feminine (Clark) or working-class (McMillan) or both. Consequently, when first-year composition courses act as social inoculations against popular culture, they simultaneously are working to moves students toward a mode of presentation and response that is more associated with middle-class values -- detachment, analysis, exposition, and moderation (Bloom, 656; Newkirk 101). And what Barry Brummett calls the "discursive nostalgics" such as Neil Postman and Sven Birkerts, who lament the loss of a supposed golden age of discourse, also long for a system that, through its discourse, maintained the elite privileges and biases of that culture (56-57). Students who enter a first-year writing course with a strong sense of television literacy and a weaker sense of print literacy, may face class as well as literacy barriers. Students from upper middle-class families, such as Peter and Karen, watched enough television to be able to talk about it comfortably and with authority. They also read enough to be able to talk about print literacy the same way and could move easily from talking about one literacy to the other. Students from working-class families with less experience in print literacy were less able to make the same transitions.

Although there is a tendency to blame television for this weaker print literacy, it does not explain students who do watch a great deal of television and yet still have strong print literacy skills. As Dyson points out, middle-class and poor and working-class children may all use popular culture material such as television and video games. "But the former children's out-of-school lives are more likely to involve other cultural materials highly valued by schools (e.g., those available in theaters, museums, books stores, and libraries)" (Writing Superheroes, 181). More affluent parents use these other materials to try to socialize their children into particular expressions of taste that will be acceptable in elite culture and in the academy. Other research indicates that while television may have an

effect in terms of the time spent on reading, the greater influence on print literacy skills, particularly in the formative elementary school years, is the availability and encouragement to read sophisticated print material (Neuman 155). In one study of fourth through sixth grade children, there was little difference in literacy skills between children who watched little television and read high quality material and those who watched a great deal of television and read high quality material. The significant difference in the study came with children who watched a great deal of television but read low-quality print materials. Not surprisingly these were generally children from families lower on the class ladder (Neuman 154-155). In short, it may not be getting rid of television that is the key to a more sophisticated print literacy, but instead what may be more important is working to provide the experience of engaging with more sophisticated print texts both in reading and writing. Certainly that is a pedagogical focus many composition teachers would embrace. Yet students who have weaker print literacy skills may have strong television literacy skills that do not get recognized or utilized in a writing course.

Bourdieu maintains that teachers, who have the cultural capital but not the means to acquire the trappings of taste, choose instead an "ascetic aestheticism," a rejection of consumer culture and a simultaneous cultivation of the ability to talk about high culture (287). It is tempting to take such an idea and create an easy binary between elite English teachers and working-class students. Such a construction ignores the working-class origins of many teachers and the overt and conscientious desire of many teachers to work with working-class students and address issues of class. Still, if we, as writing teachers, ignore the kind of literacy some working-class students may have, in this case television, and demean the source of that literacy we serve only to marginalize further those students in the name of high culture (Buckingham and Sefton-Green 213).

When faced with patterns or forms of expression that differ substantially from the middle-and-upper-class norms that dominate in first-year composition courses there remains a strong urge to correct the errors that mark a student using these patterns, often

derived from popular culture, as the "Other" (Miller 55). There is also often an accompanying search for causes of the cognitive and social weakness that led to such errors. The cultural and political pressure for standards and standardized assessment only increases the pressure to find out, as Victor Villanueva puts it, "what is wrong with them" (11). It is not unusual for these searches to focus on poor and working class students and to often note their familiarity with television as both a significant cause of their weak print literacies and a proof of their class status. Again, if part of the purpose of first-year composition is to assimilate students into the mores and discourses of the middle class, part of that effort must be to move working-class students away from their experiences -- and expertise -- with popular cultural forms that lack currency in the academy. As Villanueva, Helen Fox, Mike Rose, Lisa Delpit and others have pointed out, when students unfamiliar with the conventions of the academy enter our classrooms we need both to consider what skills and literacies they bring with them, as well as making clear to them the discursive conventions of the classroom and the academy -- and making clear that the latter are only conventions, not truths.

In Lives on the Boundary, Rose writes about working-class students in one class who begin to bring him poems they had written or found in magazines and liked: "These threw me. they were sentimental as could be, and the rhymes were strained, and the diction archaic. They were the kinds of poems all my schooling had trained me to dismiss" (163). Rose realizes that he cannot simply dismiss these poems, they mean too much to the students who wrote or found them; on the other hand he does not want to leave these students with a sense of poetry that ends with this material. It is only after some time that he finds a solution:

> I simply Xeroxed their poems and sent them to everybody along with my own selections. What followed was a nice surprise. The participants ended up liking both, but for different reasons: they liked the rhymes in the poems they had selected and liked the feelings of the ones I picked And that opened the door for us

> to not only share the associations and memories the poems evoked, but to talk a little about technique as well (163).

Rose realized the need to bring the knowledge, the literacies, and the enthusiasms these students possessed into the classroom and use those as a bridge and a point of comparison for the literacies he wanted the students to experience. It is an example of his position that people teaching composition, particularly to students who have been marginalized in the educational system by forces such as class, "need an orientation to instruction that provides guidance on how to determine and honor the beliefs and stories, enthusiasms, and apprehensions that students reveal. How to build on them, and when they clash with our curriculum...how to encourage a discussion that will lead to reflection on what students bring and what they're currently confronting" (236).

In a similar way, writing teachers can recognize with their students the literacies they do bring to the classroom from their deep experiences with television. These literacies not only provide often marginalized students with a position from which they can speak with authority, but also can be gateways to otherwise hidden student knowledge about the society and culture at large (Dyson, "Coach Bombay's Kids Learn to Write" 368). There is then the opportunity to bring such existing literacies together with the print literacies valued in the first-year writing course and, with students, explore the commonalties and the differences. What Dyson argues in her work with elementary students and writing could be well considered by the college composition community. She maintains that students find meaning and powerful narratives and images in popular media and that, particularly those from marginalized groups, use such narratives and images to find a way to greater communicative resources and agency as writers (396). On the other hand, she maintains that, "If official curricula make no space for this agency, then schools risk reinforcing societal divisions in children's orientations to each other, to cultural art forms, and to school itself" (Writing Superheroes 180). Dyson's advocacy of "permeable curricula" that allow for students to bring their cultural and textual knowledge into the

classroom where they can interact with other students and with the teacher's knowledge of texts and communication, (Dyson, "Coach Bombay's Kids Learn to Write" 397) is one that is just as important to consider for first-year college students. I will address questions of curriculum and course objectives in the next chapter.

Again, not all students who watch a great deal of television are working class any more than all students with critical print literacy skills are middle- or upper-class. Nonetheless, there are clear class implications involved in how students view and interpret television and print and how those literacies are recognized or responded to in a writing classroom. We need to recognize such implications and to consider working with television as yet another way to reach out to those students most often excluded or at risk in higher education. In the words of Gary Tate, we need "to understand that effective teaching involves not only the knowledge that gives the course its title, but also the lives of the students who sit before (or around, or with) me" (260).

In the last three chapters I have focused on how student experiences with television influence how they view reading and writing in general, and the work in a first-year composition course in particular. It is vital that we take the time to think about these influences and where they converge and conflict with what we are trying to teach; and it is just as vital that we often take the time to engage our students in conversations about the television literacies they bring to the classroom. I've yet, however, to address in detail the implications of the information I have presented in the last three chapters for the teacher sitting in a first-year writing classroom. How might a consideration and recognition of these television literacies change the ways in which that teacher organizes and teaches a first-year composition course? What pedagogical strategies might we begin to think about that would be able to make the articulations we seek between the literacies students have developed from watching television and the print literacies we want them to learn in higher education? In the next chapter I will present some ways we can begin to re-think the way

we teach first-year composition. But I will also raise the question of whether, in an age where communication technology is altering, almost on a daily basis, the relationship between the image and the printed word, we need to go beyond simply retooling our pedagogies and instead reconceive the nature of a first-year communication course as well as the field of composition and rhetoric as a whole.

[1]The groups were comprised of these students:
Group 1: Peter, Joe, and Rick
Group 2: Irene, Karen, Julie, and Lynn
Group 3: Bruce, Courtney, Andrew, and Jennifer
Group 4: Mary, Kevin, and Etienne

[2]The location and time of day for these sessions was prescribed by the University Internal Review Board on research with human subjects which mandated that the sessions must take place in a classroom during daytime class hours. Consequently I scheduled the sessions for the Multimedia Classroom in the library where, at least, the chairs were comfortable and the equipment reliable.

[3]Perhaps I believe it is art because it is most definitely a narrative of revelation.

[4]I chose The Singing Detective because I was confident that none of the students would have seen it before, even though it has been broadcast on some PBS stations. I was correct in my assumption.

[5]I had the students read the last section of the essay, from the number IV to the end. For those not familiar with the essay, it is a section of about three pages in print.

[6]As I noted in Chapter Two, there were clearer differences in preference determined by gender.

CHAPTER V

SHIMMERING DISCOURSE: NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND THE WAY WE WRITE

> The medium of school is language, written and spoken; screen time is visual. Children learn vocabulary and how to think from reading, not from watching. School needs long attention spans; television encourages short ones. The ability to relate to others is an essential skill in school and beyond; screen time promotes isolation. -- Alison Lankenau, director, elementary division, Berkeley Carroll School. Brooklyn.

> Contemporary culture is, by and large, *electronically mediated* culture: the book is no longer the single privileged means of representation that it may have been in earlier times. Literacy in the late 20th century therefore cannot be seen as something that is confined to one particular medium or form of expression. -- David Buckingham and Julian Sefton-Green. Cultural Studies Goes to School: Reading and Teaching Popular Media.

> We have our distances but we cannot escape television, and we move easily, naturally in its world, on its terms. -- Stephen Heath. "Representing Television"

Alison Lankenau, in her letter to the editor in The New York Times, stakes out a position about television's place in education that reflects the common wisdom held by many teachers at all levels of education. During the time I have worked on this project, as I have described it to teachers I know from university colleagues to friends at conferences to my children's' elementary school teachers, my description has often elicited a response quite similar to Lankenau's -- a series of truisms about the incompatibility of television and the classroom often followed by laments about television's deleterious effect on students' print literacies. And, though there are some rather glaring contradictions in Lankenau's set of oppositions -- that television is only visual, for example, or that television is isolating but reading is not -- I do share the concerns of many teachers that students' lack of experience and interest in print texts makes it more difficult for them to explore the kind

of extended analysis that is vital for certain kinds of intellectual work. I too would like to see all of my students embracing the world of print and reading and writing creative and challenging works with enthusiasm and delight.

Concerned as I am about some students' weaknesses with print literacies, however, I cannot but find the description of literacy in our contemporary culture offered by Buckingham and Sefton-Green more accurate, more persuasive, and more inclusive. Recently I was teaching a course, Introduction to Critical Analysis, that is viewed by the literature faculty in the English department of the University where I was working as a course of vital importance. It is in this course that the literature faculty want to be certain that students, particularly English majors, learn the appropriate "academic" ways to read and write critically about literary texts before moving on to upper-level courses. On the last day of class I asked the students which of the works we had read had been most enjoyable for them, not necessarily worthiest, but simply most pleasurable. To my surprise, many of them chose not contemporary short stories or poems, but Sophocles' play Antigone. When I expressed my surprise to the class and asked why so many of them had chosen this work, one student raised her hand and said, "I thought it was cool. It was like an episode of Law and Order." Other students nodded in agreement.

How, as a teacher, should I respond to such a moment in an English class? Had the student missed the point of Antigone and somehow devalued this classic text by comparing it with a weekly television series? Is it lamentable that the student's way of connecting with the play was through television? Should I echo the comments of columnist Richard Roeper about the increase in reading created by Oprah Winfrey's showcasing of books on her television show: "How wonderful that they're reading again. How sad, too, that it took a TV personality to change their ways." (qtd. in Bayles). Has television ruined them for reading, or at least made them unable to come to books untainted? Should I give in to a low level of anxiety, now that this transgressive television text has reared its head in the classroom and politely change the subject?

Or had I just been given a lesson in multiple literacies and true intertextuality? Television had been in the classroom with us during all of our reading, discussion, and writing about Antigone, I just hadn't noticed it. It was a reminder, as the Heath quote leading this chapter states, that we cannot escape television. In this literature class we were indeed moving in a television world, on television's terms. I wasn't sure what to do, immediately, with the student's comment, except to what I always do when momentarily stumped in the classroom -- ask "Why?" The ensuing conversation, which engaged almost all the students in the class, brought us back to previous discussions about the nature of morality and justice and the position of the individual and the position of the state, but framed them for all of the students in their contemporary lives. Even more interesting was when the conversation turned to the two *representations* of justice and morality and the individual and the state in popular cultural forms, the purpose of those forms, and the effects on the audience. Unfortunately it was the last day of class, yet I knew that the student had just given me a pedagogical gift and the next time I taught the course I brought Law and Order in from the beginning, as well as having students stage their own trial of Antigone, and we were able to explore all of the issues, including the issues of representation, with more enthusiasm and depth.

In this final chapter I will examine how, as teachers, we can acknowledge the presence and force of television in a writing classroom as well as ways that we can use television, not only as texts to critique, but as a form of literacy that can be used to connect and engage with the kind of print literacy we want our students to learn. At the same time we can provide students with ways of understanding the differences between television and print literacies and how to make judgments, considered rather than simply reflexive judgments, about the values and uses of each kind of literacy. I see this project as providing richer articulations among multiple literacies that will help students use their critical reading and writing skills as they move from one medium to another. Such an approach involves readings of both television and print that recognize the rhetorical nature

of all texts and writings, the use of irony as a move toward critique, and the uncovering of the rhetorical differences between word and image. Although the first part of the chapter will focus on possible pedagogies in a first-year composition course -- a course that has been the focus of this project and a course that still dominates our conception of ourselves as a field -- the second part of the chapter raises the question of whether the focus of composition studies on print literacy is sufficient or realistic in a time when electronic computer and video technology offer so many more options of how we can communicate with one another. If we ignore and deride new and evolving forms of electronic communication, composition and English studies in general, risk ending up as marginalized, vestigial organs of the humanities in the academy. Rather than being the last bastion of exclusively print literacy, we need to reconnect with the field of Communication in order to create conversations and courses that engage us and our students in multiple literacies of visual, print, and electronic media. We need to think about how the material conditions and social practices surrounding such media influence the construction and reading of texts. And, in an age with so many media and forms from which to choose to get a message across, delivery, the often-neglected rhetorical consideration, should as Kathleen Welch maintains again become an area of concern in our research and teaching. It will force us to consider how the effect of the choices of print, image, and video available to us and our students in order to deliver a message or explore an idea, and to consider the consequences and the constraints of making each choice. It will require us to think more creatively about the nature of rhetoric, drawing on ideas such as the concept of "mosaic" as a way of understanding the rhetoric of making meaning out of the whirlwind of popular culture.

Certainly the idea of using television to talk about rhetorical forms is not brand new. As I have noted in earlier chapters, television, particularly with the advent of cultural studies, has occasionally been used in first-year composition class as a text to be analyzed

and criticized. It has also, less frequently, been held up as an analogous form of composition -- all programs are part of a creative process -- that can be used as a metaphor for composing print texts (Costanzo 79). And, as I have said before, I see value in both of these approaches. Yet neither approach makes any significant moves toward recognizing the literacy skills students bring to their writing from television nor do they begin to try overtly to unravel the contradictions between television as discursive forms and the discursive forms privileged in a writing classroom, as I have tried to do in this project. In the writing classroom, then, perhaps the simplest productive thing to do with television is to recognize its powerful presence and to engage with students in conversations about its presence and how that influences how they view communication. What do they like about television? How do they read it? How do they make meaning from the words and images? For what purposes do they watch? What do they expect from reading and writing? What are the differences in conceptions of authorship, time, intent, pleasure, images, words, a readerly text and a writerly text? How do commercial concerns organize television programming and how is that different from the way information is organized and presented in higher education? Where is there pleasure in analysis and how do we move from affect to analysis and back as we read and write? What different positions must they occupy to be a member of the audience or a critic?

Making such a conversation part of a first-year writing class would accomplish several things. First, it would allow students to bring to the class the sophisticated critical literacies that they have developed through watching television -- and the authority with which they can display those literacies -- and to use those literacies both as a starting place for discussing the rhetorical concepts they will need to use in print and as a basis for comparison of the similarities and differences between the different media. Such an exploration is what Anne Haas Dyson advocates in her conception of "permeable curricula" that encourage students to bring their knowledge of culture into the classroom where it can interact with the knowledge of the teacher and of their classmates ("Coach

Bombay's Kids Learn to Write" 397). Also, it would provide an opportunity for a clearer discussion of why the students were in a first-year writing course. In a culture where, in the popular cultural market place, the extended print work has been eclipsed by electronic audiovisual media, the academy, where the book or scholarly article still reigns, needs to face the reality that it must persuade incoming students of the reasons it continues to find value in print literacy. Rather than assuming that students see the same value and utility in the uses of print literacy and the reflective or analytical turn valued in the academy, such a conversation about the nature of the literacies they possess and the nature of the kinds used in the academy might make it clearer to students that they have not just walked into a course preoccupied with correctness of form and grammar. Finally, such an open conversation would allow students to understand the strengths of print and the strengths of television and where they overlap and where they diverge. Rather than having a nagging sense, but not an ability to articulate, why they like television but not reading or writing, they would again have the chance to see what the differences between the two forms are and to come to a conscious decision about the nature and reasons for their preferences.

Obviously there are many things to cover in a writing course and I don't suggest that this conversation dominate every class, though I do see it as part of an ongoing conversation that will help students develop metacognitive skills about forms of discourse, nor will such a conversation magically resolve all the issues at conflict. Yet if we can get over our response to television as only a threat to the development of writing and reading skills, and view it instead as a complementary medium, engaging students in experiences that require similar processing tools such as judgments about comprehensibility, the ability to generate inferences and interpret content (Neuman 90), I am convinced we can engage students in print literacy more effectively and with less resistance and anxiety. I agree with David Buckingham and Julian Sefton-Green when they write:

> Any text that we might choose to use in our classrooms will come already surrounded by assumptions and judgments about its cultural value, which students

> themselves will inevitably articulate and wish to debate. The crux is surely that they should be able to *question* the processes by which such judgments are made, as well as their social origins and functions, as part of their study of the text (5).

I believe that composition studies should be not entrenched behind the ramparts of some romanticized view of essayistic print literacy, but instead in the forefront of exploring the evolving nature and interactions of both print and electronic literacies. We should be engaging both our students and ourselves in the kinds of questioning of social origins and functions of texts and literacies that Buckingham and Sefton-Green propose.

I will take up the broader political and philosophical questions that such a position implies in a moment. First, however, I want to note some of the practical classroom moves that can result in the kinds of conversations happening with students that I mentioned above. These are by no means meant to be an exhaustive list of pedagogical possibilities, but rather reflect some initial classroom ideas that I have used in exploring issues such as reading the visual and reading print, the uses of surfaces and interiors, meaning making from television and the writing process, and the move from irony to critique. I hope that these ideas will be seized upon, altered, expanded, and lead to more creative thinking about how we can respond to television in the classroom.

Tuning In the Classroom

During the first week of class I often use the same clip from The Singing Detective that I watched with students during this project (see Chapter Four), or some other non-linear but visually rich piece of television or film, to begin a semester-long conversation about how we make meaning from the texts we read. As I did with the students in this project, I show them the clip out of context, with no background explanation of what they are about to see. In class, then, rather than simply asking them what they thought was going on, I instead have them write about what they noticed in the clip, what they thought was happening, the emotions it evoked, and questions that they had after watching the clip. Then, without discussion, we watch the clip again, and write again trying to find new

details, answer existing questions, and find new questions. After writing for a second time, we begin to talk about what we saw, how we interpreted it, and what questions we had. As with students in this project, the students in my classes are very good at figuring out what is going on, particularly after being able to write about details and questions. They then find that many of their questions get answered in class discussion. It is at this point that I begin to ask how they are able to read the clip so successfully. This conversation often leads to the same kinds of comments about the richness of descriptive content in an image and the comfort they feel in processing multiple rich images quickly as I discussed in Chapter Four.

Finally, we watch the clip for a third time, this time with an eye not toward interpretation, but toward analysis. Not what is happening, but why it is happening. Again, after watching for the third time I have them write about the reasons they can imagine for the events happening on the screen, the ideas underlying the events, the techniques used to present those ideas, the metaphorical images used to present those ideas, and, of course, new questions. And, again, after the third watching we talk about how and why they have analyzed the clip as they have. By this third watching and writing, they have usually been able to do quite perceptive and intelligent interpretation and analysis of this ten-minute clip. When I ask them to come up with a list of five questions or ideas that they might pursue in further writing about this clip, they are able to generate a list, usually longer than five ideas, quickly and easily.

At this point in the class I hand out a poem, something they do not know, preferably something I do not know either. (My colleagues know when I am doing this exercise in class because I begin trolling the halls asking for good poems to use.) As with many students, the ones in my class often freeze at the sight of a poem. After years of being drilled in New Critical techniques of looking for the correct symbols, symbols they often do not see but that they know must later be regurgitated on a test, many of them have become poetry-phobes. Before we start reading the poem, however, I talk about

poems as texts of images, metaphors, emotions, and ideas -- just like the film clip we watched. I remind them of how easily and quickly they could identify, interpret, and then analyze the clip and assure them they can do the same with the poem. We then follow the same process of multiple readings, writings, and discussions about the poem, a model I tell them will be useful in dealing with any kind of text. Though they often do struggle more with the poem than with the film clip, and we talk about the differences in the image and word as description and as metaphor, they do a better job of interpretation and analysis of the poem than they think they will. We also begin to talk about the interiors that the poem reveals that are not available on the screen. Many students tell me that this simple exercise goes some way toward changing the way they view both television and poetry. And I have modeled a way of reading and given them a way to bring the authority and comfort they feel with television texts to their readings of print texts.

Another assignment that can begin to address the differences between the emphasis on surfaces in television and the emphasis on interiors in academic print literacy is to ask students, as homework, to take a piece of television, part of a program or even an advertisement, and to transcribe the dialogue or narration. (This often requires that they find a way to tape the segment so that they can make an accurate transcription. If students don't have access to a VCR, the teacher could tape a number of advertisements that could be put on reserve in the library and each student could choose one to watch and transcribe.) When they bring the assignment to class and read it to their peers, it becomes clear very quickly that much of the information necessary to make meaning of the clip is contained in its visual elements. I also ask students to write a separate description of what they saw on the screen. Initially their descriptions are general and broad and, when they read them to their classmates, again they find there is much room for misinterpretation.

As I encourage them to add as much detail as possible, their descriptions often begin to include statements about emotions or ideas that were not present in the dialogue

or their initial description. When I ask them to tell me how I could see whether someone on the screen was "angry" or "frustrated" or "had a drinking problem" we begin to get at the issue of how things that can be taken in on the screen through the interpretation of actors, must come through on the page through the overt interpretation of the writer. Again, this offers a chance to discuss the relative merits of surfaces on the screen and interiors available in print. I often bring in a clip from a drama and from a documentary and point out to them how much the drama can rely on embodied acting to transmit ideas and emotions, while the documentary relies a great deal more on narration and analysis and could be more easily understood as a print text. After this class, I am often able to say to students that "I can't see the actors" or "I can't see the screen" and they understand that they are responsible for an interpretation and reflection on the page that hasn't happened yet.

A similar assignment used by Daniel Wild using film asks students to introduce themselves in "filmic terms" that both gets at the power of the image as metaphor -- a student who describes an opening shot of a cluttered room to symbolize her chaotic life -- and at the need on the page to go beyond labels such as "happy" or "sad" or "confused" when there are no actors to interpret such words for the audience (29). Such an assignment also can evoke in students a way around the linear, chronological, blow-by-blow writing that often characterizes first drafts of student personal essays. Students, who have a much more sophisticated sense of how films or television programs are constructed, may in fact bring those more complicated forms to the page in this assignment. Subsequent assignments can develop the connection between the cinematic form and the form of the print essay (29).

As I mentioned in Chapter Four, John Ellis, in his description of how television "works through" compelling issues of the day, provides both a way of understanding television and an easily available analogy for what we often want students to find in the

writing process. Ellis talks about television news programs, from breaking news through analysis to chat as a way of trying to establish order on disordered events. He argues that this is accomplished in two ways:

> It uses words, providing forms of explanation and understanding, further information and the kinds of psychological perspectives that are impossible within the news format. Television also works through by providing increasing stability to the images of disorder: it reframes and focuses; it narrativizes and adds production values (57).

As with the writing process, the method of television news is to take a disordered event, a breaking news story, and to begin to provide it with an explanatory narrative and, eventually, with criticism and analysis. It is easy, in any given semester, to find a breaking news story that will take time to develop and be analyzed on television during the semester. The class can then follow the process by which television works through the story. Initial explanations or narratives are either developed or discarded for new explanations, new events or characters emerge and alter the story or the opinions of others about the story, analysts draw different conclusions from the same events, and -- as a potent reminder of both the commercial motor that drives television and turns all events into entertainment -- the story is eventually turned into a television movie with its own authoritative narrative.

This is, at one level, a useful analogy to the writing process. Initially disordered events or ideas are put into order, revised upon further information or reflection, and eventually analyzed for underlying reasons. I have found that students find this analogy particularly helpful when it comes to explaining the need for analysis or critique of the information they have gathered. In the same way that television analysts are usually physically distant from the news events, I can help students see that they need to create an intellectual distance from the information in their writing to reflect on the reasons behind it, to try to answer the "why" questions. Sporting events on television can also be used as a microcosm of the same process. The events of the game, spontaneous and unpredictable,

are given first a narrative, and then post-game -- and eventually next-day -- analysis by the commentators.

There are, of course, significant differences between what happens as television news processes events and the way we often want students to use reading and writing in the academy. Such differences are also important to address in such an assignment. The commercial and temporal constraints on television news require that events be increasingly simplified, rather than complicated. On television the desire to keep the largest possible audience engaged, requires not depth, but breadth and easy comprehension. Ideas and issues are reduced to the point where they can be fairly easily understood. Consequently a standard narrative of the breaking story is often quickly adopted by most of the major television news outlets. Analysis of this narrative on television then often requires setting up binaries on a given issue. Nightline or The News Hour often will have two guests on to discuss a particular issue from what are constructed as the two opposing sides. News programs routinely set up stories to represent proponents and opponents of a plan and to distill those two arguments. Students in my classes easily understand that, in a piece of persuasive writing or journalism that they have to address "both sides of an issue" but rarely, unless I remind them, do they assume that there may be multiple perspectives.

In the academy, conversely, the intended audience is often assumed not to be generalists, like the broad audience watching television, but to be an audience of specialists in a given field. The level of specific expertise required to get through graduate school and then find a job in the academy is no surprise to faculty; but it is often quite a surprise to students. Many times I have seen first-year students overwhelmed by an initial trip to the periodicals floor at the library where they are confronted with a seemingly endless vista of shelves of specialized -- and in their eyes esoteric and impenetrable -- scholarly journals. I often feel the same way. I, along with most of the colleagues I know, work so hard to keep up with the literature in my discipline and field of interest, that I too rarely have time to venture further afield into other disciplines in the humanities, let alone

the sciences and social sciences. In academics the point is to understand an issue in depth and with a full comprehension of the nuances and often contradictions of the arguments. Bringing this conflict between the generalist thrust of television with its need to abbreviate and simplify and the specialist focus of academe with its need to expand and complicate into the classroom can help students understand the conventions and assumptions that guide both forms of communication.

Another brief assignment that both helps reveal the conventions of print and television, and the underlying cultural assumptions of those conventions, is to have students try to come up with their own ideas for a television series. As D.B. Gilles, who teaches television writing at New York University, notes an assignment that may at first seem a lark reveals itself to be something quite different: "Suddenly instead of ridiculing all the junk they've been watching since preschool, the students have to deliver the goods themselves. The assignment is almost always a humbling experience because these young writers discover how difficult it is to find a fresh concept" (48). The difficulty for the students, in particular, is dealing with the commercial constraints of television programming. They find it is much more difficult to come up with an interesting and new idea, set of characters, and setting that can provide, week after week, a conflict that can be resolved in the show's time slot, and yet not solve the central problematic of the series. Add to this the pressure to keep such a series going for one hundred episodes, in order to make itself profitable in syndication (Gilles 48) and the commercial constraints on the conventions of television writing begin to become onerous for the students. This also allows a further discussion of the conventions and assumptions constraining assignments in the writing classroom.

Such an assignment also provides a space to begin to discuss the difference between television and print texts in terms of their relationships to audience and agency. As I mentioned in earlier chapters, the experience of most people in watching television is

as a member of the audience. As members of that audience they may control how they read the text on the screen, at the least they interpret it through their own experiences, or they may even make new sets of meaning by zapping among the multiple channels. Yet as engaged as they may be with reading the shows on the television, they are not going to be expected to create their own. For most people, as I discussed in Chapter One, television is a "readerly" text, one that they consume and put to their own uses, but not one that they will produce. This may explain, as I noted in Chapter Three, the reticence and even discomfort in the struggle of students in this project for an appropriate response when I asked them if they thought they could write a television program. It is difficult for the television audience to see the programs as having been "written" instead of simply being there to be read when the set is switched on. This also explains the difficulty the students I talked with had, also in Chapter Three, in seeing television programs as being "authored" instead of simply appearing through the virtual window of the television screen.

In the writing classroom, on the other hand, students are not only supposed to be authoring their own work, but they are supposed to be seeing the print works they read as being authored. In their responses to the works they read they are often asked to respond to that authorial presence in their criticism. Or they are expected to replicate in their own writing the technique and authorial presence of the writers they have read. Along with other colleagues, I have often given students in my writing classes the assignment of finding a writing "mentor." In other words, the student is to select an author she or he likes, read broadly and deeply of that author's work, and then analyze the author's craft, technique, and presence as a way of coming to a more intimate understanding of how such considerations might also work in the student's writing. Like my colleagues, however, I have found this assignment to be surprisingly frustrating for many students who seem unable to go beyond summarizing the content of the work they have read. They are not accustomed to seeing the hand of the author in the writing, to seeing the work they are reading as having been produced by a single sensibility and identifying how that sensibility

has worked. In turn then, it should not be surprising that they have trouble creating that same authorial presence in their own writing. And though there are many theoretical discussions about the nature of agency and the death of the author, most writing classes still expect students to display a sense of agency, critical thinking, and authorial presence in their writing. Having to, for a moment, consider the process of creating television, to consider how they might have to author a television program -- and even where the nature of that authorship lies in television -- is another way to draw a distinction between print and television and, at the same time be clearer about the role of the author in a piece of writing. It helps begin the conversation that probably many teachers aren't aware they need to have, about what it is an author does for the print text, especially when there are no actors available to inhabit and interpret the work for the audience.

The final piece of practical classroom work I want to discuss involves the use of irony as it pertains to television. In earlier chapters I noted the way the students in this project both used irony when talking about television, and could often identify irony and its effect on what they were watching. Although the ironic position students often take in regard to television -- and that television often takes in regard to itself -- is not a substitute for critique or analysis, it can provide an important first step toward those other skills. The move toward irony requires a stepping back from our emotional engagement with a text; it involves an awareness of the text as a text and, by extension, an awareness of the forms and conventions of the text. To take the ironic position requires that we, as the audience, be conscious of the discourse and of our position as the audience of that discourse. Part of the allure of self-consciously ironic shows such as Mystery Science Theater 3000, Seinfeld, The Simpsons, or Late Night with David Letterman is that we are almost able, in the words of Mitchell Stephens, to "watch ourselves watching ourselves watching" (224).

Stepping back from our emotional engagement with a text and being aware of its presence as a text and of the conventions and forms of the text are all initial moves that we

expect of analysis. Of course the differences between irony and analysis are often depth and destination. We expect analysis to explore in depth the reasons a text is constructed or received as it is and to result in a deeper intellectual and critical understanding of the nature of the text. Irony often begins and ends with the surface quip and seems destined only for a indifferent cynicism. Jim Collins' questions about television's hyperconscious sense of irony are important ones for us to ask as well: "Is its ultimate effect emancipatory, leading to a recognition that television's representations are social constructions rather than value-neutral reflections of the 'real' world? Or does this irony produce a disempowering apathy, in which no image is taken at all seriously?" (336).

I do not believe that irony need necessarily be confined to cynicism and apathy. I believe that the ironic positions students often take in relationship to television can be pushed further into a deeper and more fulfilling critique -- and one that students find meaningful and pleasurable. In order to do this in the classroom, it is necessary first to help students define irony, to help them recognize it in their responses, and to help them understand what is being said and how those words are being turned against themselves. At this point the conversation can turn to the question of what cultural assumptions allow for irony. What do they, as television viewers, understand about the conventions and forms of the media that allows them to make that step back toward self-conscious irony? All I have to do to get a laugh out of my students is to stand in front of them and solemnly announce, "I'm not a doctor, but I play one on TV." But, after the laughter dies down, we can begin to unravel the reasons for the laughter. Why is this statement so dated, so insincere, so open for irony? How can they explain the assumptions that allow them to take such an ironic position to what I just said? How would they describe their position in regard to that statement, and how is it different from a statement still capable of creating an affective response such as "The child is dying from cancer"? I have found that students are quite willing to engage in this kind of digging into the reasons behind their ironic responses. From such an analysis it is easier to move them toward similar critiques of the

assumptions that are the foundations for the other texts they are writing and reading. When students produce drafts of persuasive essays and I ask them whether they think their readers will respond with an ironic smirk or with serious consideration, they find themselves going back to the drafts to try to uncover and consider the assumptions on which they have built their writing.

Part of the power of television is its ability to move, and to move us as audience members, so quickly from affect to irony and back again. There are contemporary writers, reared on television, such as Dave Eggers, author of A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius, who are writing to similar effect. His memoir of his parents' death and his subsequent parenting of his younger brother uses irony to clear out the maudlin clichés of movie-of-the-week domestic tragedies and uses the space to explore a rawer insight and emotion. Irony, in his book, does not in the end preclude rage and overwhelming sorrow. As writing teachers we need to be aware of this as one example of a way in which writing can draw from the ironic culture of popular media and yet still explore the interiors for which it is so well suited.

Texts and Technology in the Writing Classroom

The assignments and approaches I discuss above are all ways that I believe television can be brought usefully into the first-year composition course. They are methods that can draw on an authority students possess while still bringing them into the kind of critical print literacy we set as our goal. Yet all of these methods still use television as a supplementary text to the real work in essayistic or persuasive reading and writing that is expected to be the focus of a first-year writing course. Television, like other forms of electronic media such as film or music, is seen as an "audiovisual aid", a tool to help illustrate literature or culture or to motivate writing, but not as the possibility of the being considered a central focus of reading or creative production (Fischer 177). As I noted in Chapter One, popular cultural texts may be used in composition courses as content to

critique, but the writing that is assigned is expected to be conventional, detached, analytical print texts. In the same way that Lucy Fischer describes film studies as having been considered the "Exotic Primitive to the Cultured Norm" (176), television is considered the ugly stepchild of even other popular cultural forms such as film or music. Consequently television can be studied as a sociological or cultural phenomenon, but not as an art form or source of literacy.

With the advent of new media technologies, such as personal computers, digital cameras, and the Internet, the nature of the text an individual can produce is changing rapidly and radically. I would like to finish this project with a discussion of how these changes in the means of producing and distributing texts may be altering our possibilities for how we choose to communicate. Such a discussion will begin with television, but must include other media; the intertextual nature of new media technologies and how we and our students will be using them mean that, while the issues I have discussed about television will continue to exist, they will be increasingly connected with other electronic and print media. In the field of composition and rhetoric, we are both ethically obligated, and well-positioned, to lead our students and ourselves into a world where multiple literacies are recognized, read, produced, and valued.

As I noted in Chapter One, comparisons between television and print literacy in the academy are often difficult to sustain beyond looking for some broad rhetorical similarities because the media are judged in such different terms. Commercial television is judged by popular response to its value as diversion rather than the intellectual or aesthetic value the academy ascribes to the print texts it presents in courses or books and journals. I believe that this will remain the case in terms of commercial television. At the same time, however, the technological changes in computers, film, video, and even print are going to allow individuals to create and view forms of each of these media -- as well as hybrids of them all -- that will draw from the essential literacies individuals have learned from television, but move beyond simple commerce or the popular response as their primary

motivation. It is possible now, and will be all the easier in years to come, to film and edit video and to create animation on a home computer and then post such texts on-line to be retrieved, and perhaps responded to, by other readers. As the means of producing and distributing video becomes less capital intensive and less controlled by the commercial considerations of what we now define as television, the possibilities will increase that individuals will attempt to use the form for greater experimentation, intellectual probing, and the creation of art. There will, I believe, be greater possibilities of overlap and intertextuality among the media of print and image that we still usually consider separate. If technology is socially applied knowledge (Kress 54) and it is the social conditions of a given moment that determine how it is applied and received, then we, in the academy, should be, rather than rejecting or dismissing new forms of technology, instead thinking about what role we might try to play in shaping and responding to such social conditions.

For example, entertainment and advertising on television are often written and produced within a structure that presents good versus bad -- and in which the good will triumph -- with easily understood images to accompany each side. It we view this kind of reduction of complex issues to images of pro and con as a rhetorical strategy rather than simply watering down the content, we can see it as metonymy (Brummett 27). Brummett maintains that metonymy is the "master trope" of contemporary public discourse as the electronic media alter the complex issues in our world into images and catch phrases that we, as viewers, can comprehend quickly and easily. "What the public finally receives as 'public discourse' in this era is not merely a watered-down version of great debates occurring in distant halls but is a radical transformation of issues into a different form of public discourse" (27).

Our assumption, as a culture, is that, because the information on television is presented quickly and with images that it does not require the any intellectual faculties or skills. We assume that it does not require the skills that reading or writing print in depth requires. One of the influential formative ideas in modern composition theory is that

writing provides a unique and powerful form of learning that is superior to other forms because of the cognitive processes it requires (Emig). In composition the phrase "write to learn" has been widely, and correctly, embraced. I am persuaded by the idea that writing provides a powerful form of learning, particularly the kind of in-depth, analytical learning that is expected in higher education. What I would question, however, is the contention that one form of communication, printed exposition or argument, is inherently more intellectually challenging or rewarding than another, such as moving and talking images. Is exploring the interiors of a question, an idea, or even ourselves -- all important and valued intellectual projects -- the only form of fulfilling and appropriate intellectual engagement? Or, as Mitchell Stephens asks when talking about the possibilities of individuals creating new, rapidly edited video texts on their home computers to distribute over the Internet, "Why do we assume there is more truth inside us than out? Why is there not as much to be learned by picking apart, rethinking, reimaging our surfaces -- from a *superficial* analysis -- as there is from an analysis of those mythical insides?" (215). The concept of multiple intelligences and modes of learning has begun to change approaches to teaching in the K-12 curriculum but, by and large, has not made significant inroads into higher education. I believe that such a shift is both necessary and on the way and that, in composition, we need to consider and include the ways other media allow for learning and intellectual exploration.

Critical and creative thinking does benefit from the ability to form one's thoughts and then somehow to be able to step back from them to contemplate and reflect. As a goal in the teaching of composition and communication that concept of critical and creative thinking is one we should continue to pursue. What will be changing in years to come is not the desire of individuals to create texts that express their thoughts and explain the world to themselves and others. What will be changing, what is changing already, is the nature of the texts that individuals will be able to create. Composition has concerned itself

with making meaning through the production of print texts; we need to open the field to the possibility of texts in other forms and combinations.

This will require, however, that we in composition see the study of the multiple literacies made possible by these new technologies as central our field, and not just a series of more clever audiovisual aids that help us do our old job better. Unfortunately the political walls to prevent this from happening are high and strong. As I discussed in Chapter One, print culture is the backbone of the academy. Print texts, particularly in the humanities, are still regarded as the potential repositories of the best thinking, of the secular salvation of society. Although there are many in English studies who accept the concept that high culture and popular culture are products of the same cultural forces and ideology, alongside that acceptance remains a commitment to the printed word over the moving image as the more rigorous, creative, and intellectual form (Marc 41). As David Marc maintains:

> The book is put on a pedestal as white magic Art, while television, to name the salient example, is mistrusted as a black magic Communication system. "Art" and "Communication" are seen as separate, even unrelated subjects. Art stimulates the imagination by leading consciousness through metaphor; communication aborts imaginative capacity by handing down orders and flattering nitwits (41).

To anyone doubting this orientation, consider how a course in an English department consisting of only video and film, both as texts students read and the ones they produce, would be received by members of the department at large, not to mention members of the administration. Too often the position in English courses is closer to that of a colleague of mine who said, "I've got to make them love writing. Where else are they ever going to get it?" English studies in general and composition in particular continue to hold out the practice of print literacy as fulfilling both personally and professionally. Students are often told that they need to take composition courses because they will need a more sophisticated print literacy in the professional lives they hope to pursue after college; certainly I have made this case to students in my courses. It is an intriguing mixture of

messages: that writing and reading should be something students should learn to love, and if they don't their movement into the professional middle class will be threatened.

Yet outside of higher education, print literacy often fails to have the impact of electronic popular cultural forms such as television, film, and music. (The Internet is a different development that I will discuss in a moment). Compared with the ability of media such as television and film to shift and evolve seemingly from week to week, the print texts valued in higher education seem static and old. As Marc says, "In popular culture the written word is considered slow and user-unfriendly and is avoided or abbreviated wherever possible (whatever gets u thru the nite)" (37). In higher education the relatively unchanging print forms are important because stability and the capacity to build upon generations of knowledge are essential foundations. In this project, for example, I have built my argument not only on my observations, but on the ideas and observations of those theorists and researchers that have gone before me. I draw on those older sources not only for the wisdom they provide, but also because I know that by invoking history and established authority and displaying how the past influences my present, my work becomes more credible. Television, however, in terms of cause and effect is essentially uninterested in the past, or the future for that matter. Television is a medium of the present; it refers only to its own history. Consequently, while television programs may sometimes be dependent on familiarity of forms and genres within the medium, they are less concerned with referring to other sources as a way of establishing their credibility or acknowledging their place in a series of causes and effects. Each episode begins anew and can, its producers hope, be viewed without prior knowledge of the program. Such an approach insures that the largest number of viewers -- and consequently consumers -- can be reached. Were I writing this project from a perspective similar to the way most commercial television programs work, I would be doing it without references -- and all in present tense. Such a work would be immediately rejected in the academic world.

What I am advocating is more than simply another call to make education "relevant" to young students by attempting to co-opt their popular culture. I am arguing for a more expansive consideration of what constitutes literacy in this culture, and a more rigorous exploration of how these seemingly separate literacies overlap, complement, or conflict with each other. And I believe that this work must be done within English studies. I agree with Robert Scholes when he argues that:

> An English department cannot do everything, of course, but literary study that cuts itself off from the performing and media arts risks going the way of classics. It was not a mistake for the rhetoric department at Berkeley to incorporate the study of film and television. To such departments the future will belong -- or to English departments wise enough to embrace rhetoric and the media themselves and to find ways of connecting these contemporary texts to their more traditional concerns (161).

The failure to broaden our conceptions of literacy means that English studies and composition will become increasingly irrelevant to students, and to the academy in general. "Like a charmingly nostalgic, if somewhat dysfunctional old building that the campus just wouldn't be the same without" (Marc 38) English studies and composition will continue to have to make do with fewer students, less money, lower salaries, and less prestige than fields in the sciences, professions, and social sciences.

Some may respond to this call by noting that the study of television and film is already undertaken in higher education in departments of Communication and that duplicating their efforts would be a waste of time. I would reply that, rather than duplicating such efforts, English studies should be reaching out to Communication and that the historical events that pushed the two fields into separate departments and often different buildings are not convincing arguments to leave things as they are. The separation of Speech and English Departments in the first part of the Twentieth Century had, among its causes, a division between argument, which became the concern of Speech Departments, and exposition, which became the concern of composition courses in English departments (Connors 234). Composition's emphasis on exposition and its

residence within English departments, where literature focused on the work of individual authors, let to its continued emphasis on the acts of a single writer composing a print text. As the field of composition expanded in the Sixties and Seventies, the early work often focused on the individual writer either from a cognitive perspective or from a neo-Romantic perspective. Speech, meanwhile, focused on argument and persuasion and the effect of messages on an audience. This emphasis on persuasion and audience made Speech and Rhetoric departments natural places in which to study emerging communication technologies such as radio and film, and then, subsequently, television. In studying these communication media the focus often rested on the audience as a group, rather than the individual. Such a focus led Communication as a field to look to social sciences such as sociology and anthropology for methodologies of understanding group behavior.

Although there was a brief period after the Second World War in which general education programs embraced communications courses that would focus on speech as well as writing as a substitute for first-year composition courses, that movement had ended by the late Fifties (160). (The postwar communications movement did have one important legacy, however, and that was its reintroduction of those in composition to the ideas of rhetoric that had been sustained and developed in Speech and Communication departments. Now rhetoric and argument are considered essential parts of both English and Communication departments which, somewhat oddly, often each have their own separate courses in argument and persuasion.) As composition has developed as a field it has focused more on developing its own academic and professional identity and has been less and less in touch with Communication. At the same time, composition in the last fifteen years has begun to consider the influence of culture and society on the individual writer. Meanwhile, Communication began to consider the medium of communication and its effect on the message, the role of media in society, and the mass culture industry (Crowley and Mitchell 3).

Having taught in both fields I am aware that there remain often significant differences in philosophy and methodology between many in English and in Communication. English, in general, continues to be about the individual expressing herself through writing -- whether it is a literature course reading that writing or a composition or creative writing course producing it. Communication, conversely, is often more concerned with the social construction and consumption of texts. It is, broadly speaking, the difference between the individual seen with a sense of creative or critical agency and the individual as seen as a member of a social group and, as such, a potential victim of popular cultural forces that must be resisted. (Buckingham and Sefton-Green135). Even when English teachers use popular media in their courses, such as a television advertisement, there is a substantial difference from how they approach the presentation and discussion of it compared with their presentation and discussion of a poem or essay (131). Even though these are broad generalizations and that there is increasing overlap between the fields in terms of their conceptions of the individual and society, as well as their mutual interest in rhetoric, there remain significant differences in approach to texts between the two disciplines.

The development of cultural studies in recent years, however, has provided a substantial area of common theoretical interest between English studies and Communication. Much of the early work in cultural studies in Britain, by theorists such as Raymond Williams, addressed the artificial boundaries between high and low culture that divided literature from popular culture in the academy. Early cultural studies work, such as Williams' work on television, also looked at the role of media as a means of constructing and reproducing culture. Though such work was initially more connected with the social sciences, it has in recent years been appropriated and developed in English studies as a way of considering how the material and ideological forces of culture influence the construction of print texts. Within English studies, cultural studies has begun to change the way scholars define and examine texts. As English studies and composition

use cultural studies as a lens through which to consider how individual writers construct and consume texts, Communication uses the same theoretical lens to look at mass media and how information is produced, distributed, and consumed in the society at large. Indeed, it is the interdisciplinary nature of cultural studies that has made a project such as mine possible. Not only have I encountered time and again articles and theory in both fields that use similar theoretical approaches, but I have been able to apply such an approach to my consideration of the cultural forms and social practices of both television and the composition classroom. Cultural studies, then, is an obvious common ground on which English studies and Communication can meet and collaborate.

It is the distinctive position of composition, however, with its own interdisciplinary tendencies and its adaptations of cultural studies theories and practices, that I believe is uniquely suited to explore the concept of multiple literacies in a way that draws from both the individual and social approaches of English studies and Communication. Composition already uses methods and theories from both the social sciences and the humanities and is more open to the conception of literacies as being socially constructed and polyvocal, yet still focuses its attention on how individuals use such literacies. Just as in this project I have used qualitative research methods drawn from the social sciences along with cultural studies theories drawn from English studies. A first-year composition course with the goals of helping students to develop the metacognitive skills to understand how they make meaning from the texts they create and read as well as helping them to understand how the cultural contexts in which they write and read construct the discursive conventions that help define the texts they produce, would necessarily draw from both the cultural studies traditions of Composition and Communication. In teaching such a course the instructor would have to have a sense of how students read and use the multiple media they encounter, both within and outside of the academy, as well as an understanding of how to teach students to create texts that would fulfill the conventions of different discourse communities, or push against the boundaries of those conventions. To create such a

pedagogy would require a knowledge of rhetoric, student writing and reading practices, the production and uses of popular culture texts, and the differences in how different media are employed and consumed. This would be a first-year composition course that would bring together in productive tension the English, humanistic tradition of the individual writer making meaning of the world through a single consciousness with the Communication, social science tradition of the effect of culture and society on the same individual.

Composition has also already embarked into literacies beyond the realm of the traditional print text in its use of computer-mediated communication as a means of teaching writing. The rise of the personal computer and the Internet has, in many ways, made print a more relevant form again -- though not always in the same manner as it is experienced on paper. Not only has the use of computers in the classroom begun a rethinking of concepts such as audience and the division between the reader and the writer, but with the advent of hypertext has moved into a form of communication where print and image are combined.

In hypertext, what writing teachers know about the production of print and the relationship between the writer and discourse communities continues to be important. But, in hypertext, images are as important as words. And, as computer and network technologies continue to evolve, individuals will be increasingly able to include video and animation in hypertext documents. Before too long, then, computers will provide a platform for creating texts of almost any size and depth that are combinations of video, image, animation, and print. Such texts may allow the combination of movement and stability, of surface and depth, of associative and linear construction. Without a doubt, certain elements of literacies people have learned from electronic media such as television will figure significantly into the construction of such texts. (Though it is important to note that, in the area of computers and composition, there is relatively little discussion of popular culture at all, let alone television, as having an influence on students or texts.

Instead hypertext and other forms of computer-mediated communication tend to be placed in composition in the same privileged cultural position as print texts as the creations of individual authors connecting to individual readers.)

For example, like television, the rhetorical space of hypertext is the shimmering screen. It is different from the rhetorical space of the printed page. The rhetorical space of the screen requires a different way of thinking about writing. When I had an article accepted for an on-line academic journal I was told that I could keep the overall length of the article, but that I had to break up longer paragraphs and was encouraged to provide frequent subheadings and even to move some material to linked endnotes. This change in how we conceive of the rhetorical space may, in turn, influence other elements of form in writing for computer networks. For example, hypertext writers may increase the number of screens on which they provide information rather than have fewer screens with more text and images. This may lead to a writing in which the ideas are constructed more associatively than linearly. Like television, readers may be required to adapt to rapid shifts in the rhetorical nature of the text as they move -- or perhaps even "flow" -- from one link to the next. The traditional stylistic and organizational tools of some writing instruction such as transitions, topic sentences, thesis statements, may be irrelevant in a form in which the reader can move at will from one idea to another, more akin to zapping through television channels with a remote control than reading page by page. The reader will more explicitly construct his or her meaning based on the elements encountered and how the writer frames them in the home page. It may increase writing that will make greater use of metaphor, associative fragments, and symbolic connections (Purves 24) . In short, writing for hypertext may come closer to the kind of communication we expect from television news where discrete fragments of information and brief narratives are loosely bound by the boundaries of the program -- its theme music, set, and so on -- and internal organization cues such as graphics, rather than by an overt linear narrative structure that promotes a specific position. We already can see how the desire to replicate this experience is

reflected in a publication such as USA Today with its brief stories and vigorous use of graphics. Obviously this will not be the most effective form of communication for all ideas, but it will allow new forms of writing and communication in the same way that the printing press allowed for the rise of the novel, but did not obliterate poetry or drama.

This use of graphics on television and in some publications is another way in which these new textual forms may be different than the way we currently conceive of writing. In hypertext, there is both the ability and the expectation that the writer will use image as well as print to convey information. Electronic media have made the image an essential part of contemporary communication; hypertext does more than any other form to make the image and print inextricable and interdependent. Such texts will require new methods of critique that will look at the totality of information presented and how the delivery of that information influences its production and reception. Bill Condon and Wayne Butler, in their text Writing the Information Superhighway, provide one approach for the critical reading of web pages that includes not only familiar areas of rhetorical analysis such as Purpose, Audience, and Content, but adds other considerations such as Appearance, Accessibility, and Navigability (Condon and Butler 263-264).

In composition we know a great deal about print, but very little about the effective uses of video and image and animation. In the past these were forms of communication that were distinct and often, as in the case of making a television program or a film, required the collaboration of individuals with distinct skills in writing, cinematography, sound, editing and so on. But with new computer technologies that bring these different technologies together in one place, the production of texts in the coming years will require a competence in many modes. On a computer, when creating hypertext or a Web site "one person now has to understand the semiotic potentials of each mode -- sound, visual, speech -- and orchestrate them to accord with his or her *design*" (Kress 56). In composition we are in the position to redefine "texts" to include these other forms. In

order to do so we need to draw on the field of Communication, and to engage as a field with these overlapping and evolving literacies.

As composition begins to explore the interaction and production of these multiple literacies, it is also important to balance our focus on how individuals make meaning from these multiple literacies with a cultural studies orientation that helps us understand how material and ideological forces influence the choices -- and the availability of choices -- of the individual. Viewing television through a cultural studies lens is nothing new; but we must bring that same theoretical orientation to our understanding of the creation of texts with new media technologies. Cultural studies, as practiced in a composition course, has to be more than a simple-minded assault on the students' complicity with the dominant capitalist culture. Using cultural studies as a basis for a critical pedagogy in the classroom can easily turn into an elitist attempt to trade one set of unexamined assumptions for another that happen to be approved of by the instructor. As C.H. Knoblauch asks, "Does the moral commitment, and the political authority, of the critical teacher properly mandate a change in the consciousness of arguably disenfranchised students regardless of their own wishes, their own sense of what they might gain or lose from accommodating themselves to the dominant culture?" (15). In the privileged setting of a university, an institution that is fully part of the dominant culture, we should be wondering just how radical we can be anyway.

In particular we need to be aware of a hostility toward popular culture advanced in the name of critical education. There remain implicit distinctions in much of composition, including from many who advocate critical pedagogies, between high culture acceptable in the academy and low culture that is mass produced and popular. It is important to remember that cultural studies is not only about the consideration of popular culture as texts; instead it is about the recognition that all culture, high and low, is a result of the same conditions and practices in a society. This does not mean that agency is impossible. As Raymond Williams noted in his groundbreaking work "Culture is Ordinary" individuals

encounter culture in two ways, first the "learning of shapes, purposes, and meanings, so that work, observation, and communication are possible. Then, second, but equal in importance, is the testing of these in experience, the making of new observations, comparisons and meanings" (6). As teachers we may want to advocate certain practices as ones that will encourage more critical thinking and communication among our students and potentially offer them more control over their lives in society. Until we recognize the common cultural forces that influence our texts and practices, however, we will miss the intertextual nature of different media and how that is influencing students in our classrooms. As I have maintained throughout this project, it is vital that we engage students more fully in conversations about what they find compelling about popular culture and dominant ideologies before we decide to tell them how intellectually and ethically bankrupt they are. At the same time, as teachers, we need to adopt similar interrogations of our own roles in reproducing the dominant ideology. Rather than thinking we can act as transparent intellectuals in facilitating the liberation of the oppressed, we should, as Virginia Anderson advocates realize that the persuasive power of critical pedagogy would be improved if the critical teachers would adopt the methods they urge on their students, "to be alert as possible, within their own terministic screens, to their own contradictions, to moments when their ideals and practices, for example, do not mesh" (207).

Yet to teach composition as if it is nothing more than a method of weaning students from popular culture and assimilating them into the culture of the academy, or even seeing our work as a purely vocational tool, is to silence marginalized voices, to deny student knowledge, and to buy into capitalist oppression and social injustice. There is a value in questioning the received wisdom and to see how that is constructed by the dominant culture. As I discussed in Chapter Four and above, understanding television as a commercial discourse is important in understanding how it is produced and received as a social practice. Understanding the material conditions that construct and constrain other

media technologies, from print to hypertext, is equally important. We need to see our students, not as cultural dupes, but as active, intelligent, and curious participants in their culture and to help them find ways to read and write about it, regardless of the technology they use, in a way that helps them understand the meanings they make from it.

What I am advocating in this project requires more than simply bringing technology into the classroom. Technology is not a panacea for education, regardless of what Microsoft's advertising campaigns tell us, nor will the fact of introducing technology into a writing class mean that the technology will be used or that anything will change when it is used. In the classroom, teachers have traditionally only adopted the technologies that didn't require them to alter their familiar teaching practices -- such as blackboards, cheap paper, paperback books, and ballpoint pens -- and ignored the rest, regardless of how hard other technologies were pushed by administrators and institutions (Tyack and Cuban 122). All the classrooms in the English Department of the University of New Hampshire are equipped with television sets; yet rarely are the sets used as anything more than expensive coatracks and bookshelves by the teachers in the classrooms. Instead composition as a field -- and with our colleagues in Communication -- needs to engage in a critical and thoughtful interrogation and conversation about the nature and effect of electronic media in the writing classroom. We need to ask questions about the social context in which writing is taught and how that context is influenced by technology and popular culture, about how knowledge is generated and applied in a mass mediated culture, about what the role of reading and writing can and should be in such a culture and how that will be altered by emerging and evolving technologies. And, as we question our assumptions about print, technology, communication, and culture, we need to be courageous enough not to retreat to reactionary and romanticized ideals of a world where only the printed page matters.

Any good education should be one that forces students to question deeply held assumptions of all kinds. This is an education we need to engage in as teachers and model

for our students. And a good education should be one that brings student experiences into contact with ideas and theories that give them ways to sort through those experiences and to "see how individuals and groups engage in self-formation not as an autonomous activity but as a practice of everyday life, of poaching on the dominant culture to create popular spaces of resistance, evasion, and making do" (Trimbur, Composition Studies, 130-131). Not only is such an approach essential for educating individuals in ways to live in their society, but it is an approach that also has important implications for our lives as a society. In a world that is increasingly crowded, busy, and flooded with information, the ability of individuals to negotiate within the information-saturated culture and communicate clearly with each other is vital in maintaining a civil and humane society.

Sideshadowing, Delivery, and Mosaic

If we can broaden our conceptions of literacy we can begin to recognize that producing texts can and will be more complex than traditional print argumentative or expository essays. As teachers we can recognize, and teach, forms of intellectual engagement beyond the academic essay or research paper. For example, we can recognize parody, humor, and irony as other ways in which students can be critical of the popular culture texts they read (Buckingham and Sefton-Green 208). We can encourage students to compare the nature and utility of such forms of critique with the critical position favored by the academy and inhabited by the instructor. If we are aware of the critical potential in other forms we again do a better job of bringing existing student literacies into the classroom in a productive way. Such a process can also go some way toward disrupting the sage-on-the-stage pedagogical model and get closer to the kind of critical education advocated by theorists such as Paulo Freire that draws on student experiences and concerns while providing resources for critical thinking.

Nancy Welch offers a different metaphor that can be usefully applied in this situation in her discussion of "sideshadowing" teacher response to student writing.

Drawing the term from Bakhtinian theorist Gary Saul Morson, it is meant to contrast with the narrative technique of foreshadowing, which directs our attention toward a predetermined outcome. According to Welch "sideshadowing redirects our attention to the present moment, its multiple conflicts, its multiple possibilities" (377). Although Welch's focus is on drawing our attention to the multiple possibilities in student drafts, rather than rushing to find the "focus" of the draft that will result in what the teacher considers an appropriate revision, I also see it as a useful way of thinking about the multiple possibilities in terms of media and form that students could use to produce texts. Instead of seeing the only possibility for student texts in a writing class as the print essay, we can entertain other possibilities that will draw on other literacies of the image and the moving image. Certainly some writers such as Tom Romano have begun such explorations with their discussions of multi-genre essays that use different forms of writing and image (Romano). But I believe that if we broaden our conception of literacies and what is available for the production of student texts, again particularly through the use of computer technology, we can, as Welch writes, draw "students into considering the competing discourses, cultural norms, conflicting intentions, and textual ideals that shape and reshape a draft" (377). An approach to composition that thinks more broadly about literacy will also continue to emphasize the permeability of the divide between the creative and the rhetorical. It will help us and our students to recognize and remember that creative works are necessarily rhetorical, that there are arguments being advanced, as well as remembering that the persuasive and analytical work is also always personal.

I would not argue that there are no differences among media in terms of their production or reception or that print is not better suited to some purposes than video or the image. (In creating an extended argument such as this book, for example, print is still a highly effective and familiar form.) Nor do I believe that all will eventually be resolved in a happy hybrid of hypertext. I do, however, agree with David Marc that the academy in general, as well as composition, is so devoted to the supremacy of the printed word that it

is difficult to determine the best functions of print literacy in the contemporary blizzard of communications technologies. We need to ask, as Marc does:

> What does print actually do best? How can reading and writing be integrated into the emerging patters of normal communication in contemporary society? We are not likely to find out if we keep making believe in school that (print) literacy stands apart from, and above, all other forms of human communication (42).

Continuing to find solace in hand-wringing and bitter polemics, such as Birkerts' and Postman's, that defend the printed word at the expense of electronic text, as much as it may comfort some in composition, will not advance the cause of more humane communication between people and will certainly not serve the students our field puts at the center of our inquiry.

How, then, do we think about writing and reading these new textual forms? How do we make meaning from these multiple and overlapping literacies? For one thing, for the first time in centuries we are faced with considering the long-neglected canon of classical rhetoric: delivery (Kathleen Welch 31). Not since the written word became available to the individual, offering orality or literacy as the two choices for delivery, has there been a similar shift in the available choices for the individual for delivery. Individuals will soon have a number of choices available to them about how best to communicate their ideas. Books and print magazines will remain, of course, and many will increasingly use images not simply as illustrations of printed words but as essential elements of information that must exist alongside the words to make the text comprehensible; for an example of this, pick up any biology or engineering textbook. These forms will be joined by on-line publications, hypertext, on-line video and music, and hybrid hypertext or on-line forms that combine image, video, music, and printed text.

In our teaching, then, we need to do more than attend to the familiar rhetorical considerations such as form, audience, and style. We need to include in our teaching an awareness of medium and how the choice of medium will affect both the production and reception of the text. Welch writes:

> Raising an awareness of medium empowers students in at least two ways: (1) it makes them (and us, their teachers) conscious of the technology that will to a large extent determine the result of their decoding (that is, the "meaning"); and (2) knowledge of what a medium consists of and where it came from shows students more of the possibilities of all media and connects students' usually isolated relationships to the media (28).

Having a more sophisticated awareness of the different media available and the consequences of using the various media on both writer and reader will be a powerful rhetorical tool for student writers. It will become impossible in coming years to separate delivery from rhetorical conversations about audience, form, and style. If, in composition we pretend that the only medium of delivery worthy of discussion and practice is the printed page, we will both marginalize ourselves, but also ill prepare our students to make meaning in a world of multiple and overlapping media. It will be impossible to claim that we are helping students to learn more critical writing and reading skills if we engage them with only one of the many media they will be consuming and producing in the culture at large. Such a change in our conception of delivery will, of course, require that we as writing teachers gain a broader and more inclusive knowledge of the media available for the production of texts.

Such a change in our conception of literacy and delivery also requires that we conceive of new rhetorical strategies through which we can attempt to understand how we encounter and make meaning from the intertextual and ever-changing world of print and electronic literacies. Barry Brummett, in Rhetorical Dimensions of Popular Culture, offers the concept of "mosaic" as a more useful metaphor for understanding our readings of popular culture. Working from a concept by Samuel Becker, Brummett maintains that in our encounters with popular culture we rarely make meaning from a single text with an identifiable author or point of view. Instead we move through an environment of "bits" of information, from everything from billboards to television programs, that we then assemble into mosaics, into patterns, that offer meaning to us (64). How we understand

and make meaning about an issue such as affirmative action, for example, will be little shaped by the orations of politicians or ministers from the pulpit, as an issue might have been a century ago, but is instead shaped by the television news report we saw last night, the movie we saw the week before, a newspaper article, a radio talk show, television commercials, and perhaps even a book. Indeed, when issues is my classes arise, such as school shootings, or affirmative action, or AIDS or any other, the information the students present to the discussion is often a mosaic of the bits they have gleaned from just such a mixture of sources.

Attempting to track the nature and origin of all the bits of information is impossible in our contemporary mass-mediated culture. What is possible, Brummett contends, is the investigation and analysis of the patterns we have available to us that enable us to form the bits into meaningful messages. "We learn the standard, recurring patterns underlying televisual or newspaper narratives and are then equipped to create more diffuse texts extending across popular culture" (76). This means that television and other popular culture forms are neither completely dominant nor completely resisted, but instead offer "reservoirs of ways to manipulate signs, of the logics one might use to make meaning; (they demonstrate) patterns for ordering mosaics" (77). In this way we can make meaning from a distracted encounter with a fragmented and self-reflexive medium such as television. For Brummett, the focus of rhetoric today should be to investigate how the patterns an individual can draw from the surrounding culture could have been used to create meaning from the shifting and multiple signs that person encounters (95).

The difficulty in the use of mosaic as a form of rhetorical analysis is that the bits rarely stand still. Consequently it is not possible through this approach to take a discrete text such as Martin Luther King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" and use it in a writing class to discuss issues of ethos, pathos, logos, audience, and style. What can be done through the use of mosaic as a rhetorical strategy is to create a pedagogy that helps students understand how they understand the world, and how they are constructed within

that world, by the way they provide patterns to the bits of information they consume and decode (101). For Brummett such a pedagogy can result in students who:

> Increase their own *repertoires* of how to experience by increasing their knowledge of ways to order experience and raise their *consciousness* of how they are constrained to experience in certain ways, and the kinds of subjects they are called or positioned to be, by their culture's dominant forms of experiencing (101).

Rather than simply let my students encounter bits of information and recount those to their classmates, a rhetorical strategy of mosaic would allow the class to examine the sources of the bits of information, the patterns by which the students make meaning from the bits, and the assumptions that provide the foundation for judging the authority of the sources and the reasonableness of the patterns. This idea of mosaic has some useful pedagogical implications for how we teach writing and reading. It allows us to bring into the classroom different texts from different media and to engage in readings and criticisms of those texts that are overtly intertextual. This will provide students with pathways from popular culture texts, such as television, to the print texts they will be assigned in college courses, and with strategies for understanding the patterns created by such pathways. It will allow for critical and analytical skills that can move along multiple pathways among the media and provide a broader and more supple set of literacies for our students.

The use of a concept such as mosaic is not the single answer to how we must approach the teaching of writing in the coming years. It is indicative, however, of the kind of innovative thinking we, as a field, must undertake if we are to make our study and teaching of writing and reading more inclusive and effective in our world of multiple overlapping literacies.

To study and teach other forms of communication besides print literacy is not why many writing teachers got into the field in the first place. I know that many writing teachers, like myself, were drawn to the field by the love of the printed word -- the poem, the novel, the belletristic essay. And for many, like myself, the prospect of learning and

teaching these new forms of literacy is both unnerving and, at times, dispiriting. Yet I believe it will do none of us any good to turn our backs on the changes afoot in our culture. There will remain a place for the printed word, just as there has remained a place for drama and the poem, though no longer a central place in the culture. In the field of composition, however, I believe we have an ethical obligation to practice and teach the communicative forms that are in the center of our culture, as well as the valuable forms that continue to exist on the margins. Those central forms, which include television and other forms of popular culture, are shifting with astonishing speed. It is our responsibility to learn how words and images can work in concert to communicate our ideas. We must explore the creative tensions that exist among the different media and find ways to determine which project requires which form of delivery. We have the chance, at this moment as new technologies of print and image continue to evolve, to learn and to teach about the most effective ways to write in multiple media. Only if we broaden our vision to include a more generous and creative conception of literacy, can we grasp the opportunity to help shape these multiple literacies into forms that can carry the intellectual and creative ideas that sustain our humanity.

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APPENDIX A

Below is a list of questions that are representative of the kinds of questions I asked students during interviews. Of course, as in any interview situation, other questions arose in the context of student responses. Those questions are not reproduced here.

In addition to asking the following questions about television viewing habits and practices, I asked similarly worded questions about reading and writing habits and practices. For the sake of brevity, I have not repeated all of the questions I asked about reading and writing.)

- Describe to me what you remember watching on television when you were in Kindergarten or First Grade. In Junior High School. In High School.
- How many hours of television do you estimate that you watched each week at those ages?
- How many hours of television do you estimate that you watch now?
- Where is the television set that you watch located in your house/apartment/dorm room?
- What television programs do you watch now? What appeals to you about those programs?
- How would you define those programs?
- Do you watch television alone or with others?
- What is the best part of watching television? The worst part?
- What words would you use to describe television watching?
- How would you describe your role when watching television?
- How do you decide what to watch on television?

- Do you engage in other activities while watching television? Describe those activities.
- Do you watch television for different reasons? Describe those differences.
- What qualities make a television show "good"? What qualities make it "bad"?
- When you talk with friends about television programs, describe the nature and content of those conversations.
- Do you believe/trust what you see on television?
- Which do you find more authoritative, television or print?
- Who would you define as the "author" of a television program?
- Describe the form, or the basic episode, of a program you know well.
- How do you determine the intended audience for a given television program?
- How do you determine the main point of a television program?
- Do you notice television advertisements? Do you find them persuasive?
- How would you describe the persuasive techniques of the ads you notice?
- How much television would you estimate that your First-Year English teacher watches? What programs?
- How do you think your teacher regards television?
- How do you think television is regarded within the University in general?
- How would you compare watching television and reading? Watching television and writing?
- If you could create your own television program, what kind of program would it be? Would it be easier or harder to create a television program or write a creative work for print?

APPENDIX B

UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

Office of Sponsored Research
Service Building
51 College Road
Durham, New Hampshire 03824-3585
(603) 862-3564 FAX

LAST NAME	Williams	**FIRST NAME**	Bronwyn
DEPT	Department of English - Hamilton Smith Hall	**APP'L DATE**	2/8/99
OFF-CAMPUS ADDRESS (if applicable)		**IRB #**	2087
		REVIEW LEVEL	EXP

PROJECT TITLE Do You See What I See? Television, Discourse, and the Teaching of Writing

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research has reviewed the protocol for your project as Expedited as described in Federal Regulations 45 CFR 46, Subsection 46.110 (b) (1), category 9 .

Approval is granted for one year from the approval date above. At the end of the approval period you will be asked to submit a project report with regard to the involvement of human subjects. If your project is still active, you may apply for extension of IRB approval through this office.

The protection of human subjects in your study is an ongoing process for which you hold primary responsibility. (Please refer to the Assurance of Compliance and the Belmont Report, enclosed.)

Changes in your protocol must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval prior to their implementation. If you have questions or concerns about your project or this approval, please feel free to contact me directly at 862-2003.

Please refer to the IRB # above in all correspondence related to this project. The IRB wishes you success with your research.

For the IRB,

Kara L. Eddy
Regulatory Compliance Officer
Office of Sponsored Research

cc: File
Patricia Sullivan, English - Hamilton Smith Hall

UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

Office of Sponsored Research
Service Building
51 College Road
Durham, New Hampshire 03824-3585
(603) 862-3564 FAX

LAST NAME	Williams	**FIRST NAME**	Bronwyn
DEPT	Department of English - Hamilton Smith Hall	**APP'L DATE**	1/25/2000
OFF-CAMPUS ADDRESS (if applicable)		**IRB #**	2087
		REVIEW LEVEL	EXP

PROJECT TITLE Do You See What I See? Television, Discourse, and the Teaching of Writing

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research has reviewed and approved your request for time extension for this protocol. Approval is granted for one year from the approval date above. At the end of the approval period you will be asked to submit a project report with regard to the involvement of human subjects. If your project is still active, you may apply for extension of IRB approval through this office.

The protection of human subjects in your study is an ongoing process for which you hold primary responsibility. Changes in your protocol must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval prior to their implementation. If you have questions or concerns about your project or this approval, please feel free to contact me directly at 862-2003.

Please refer to the IRB # above in all correspondence related to this project. The IRB wishes you success with your research.

For the IRB,

Kara L. Eddy, MBA
Regulatory Compliance

cc: File ORIG APP'L 2/8/99

Patricia Sullivan, English - Hamilton Smith Hall